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ABSTRACT

This workshop kit consists of: (1) "Leader's Guide"; (2) "Handout Masters"; (3) special issue of the journal "Media & Values" on the theme "Children and Television: Growing Up in a Media World"; (4) "From Awareness to Action: Media Literacy for the '90s," a booklet on the basics of media literacy. The kit is designed for a four-part study of the role of media in society and its influence on children. By using background materials, specialized exercises, action suggestions, and analytical frameworks, this kit provides tools parents can use to understand media's continuing role in society and explore implications of that role for their children. The four sessions focus on: (1) "Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids About Television"; (2) "The Selling of Our Children: Coping with Commercials"; (3) "How Much is Too Much?: Setting Family Standards for Violent Content"; and (4) "Getting Involved: The Children's Television Act of 1990." Student materials, handouts, background readings, and follow up materials are included. (EH)

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PARENTING IN A TV AGE

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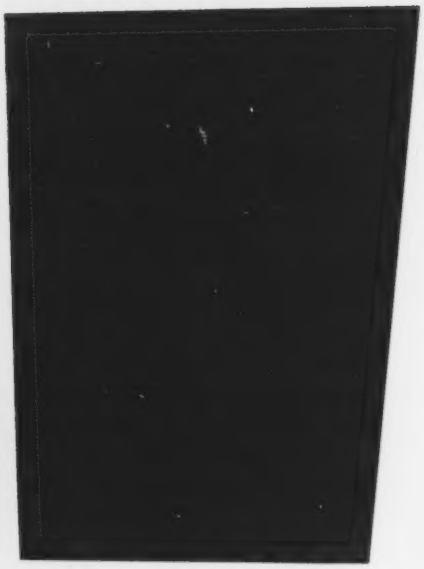
A Media Literacy Workshop Kit™ on Children and Television

Leader's Guide



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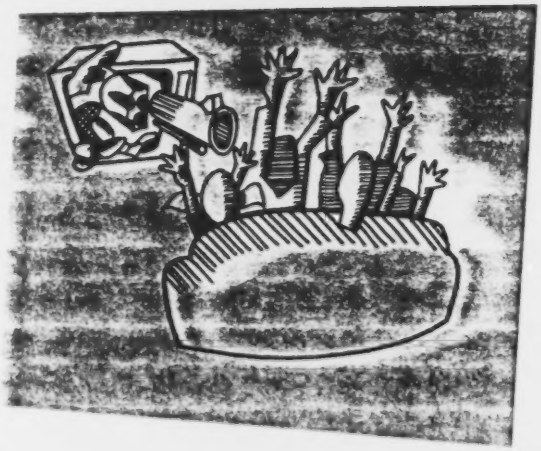

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Center for Media and Values
1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034

Canadian Order Desk
85 St. Clair Ave. E. Room 500, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8

Parenting in a TV Age

Leader's Guide

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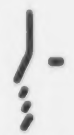
Written by
J. Francis Davis, Barbara Osborn and Elizabeth Thoman

Illustrations by
John S. Santos

Graphic design by
James Robie Design Associates

Layout design by
Kerry Gerot



CENTER FOR MEDIA AND VALUES
Los Angeles, California 90034

How *Parenting in a TV Age* Came to Be

Parenting in a TV Age is one of a series of Media Literacy Workshop Kits™ published by the Center for Media and Values, a not-for-profit educational membership organization which empowers media users by providing critical awareness about television and other media. It was developed over many months of collaboration between the following principal authors and advisors:

Authors:

J. Francis Davis, principal author, is Director of Educational Services for the Center for Media and Values, Los Angeles. He holds an undergraduate degree in communications from Auburn University and a Master of Divinity from Emory University, Atlanta. Jay most often watches television with Seàn, 9 and Garrett, 6.

Barbara Osborn, author, is a communications teacher and leads media literacy workshops in New York and Los Angeles. She holds an M.A. in Communications from Hunter College/ City University of New York and works as a freelance journalist covering the television and film industry.

Elizabeth Thoman, author and advisor, is founding editor of *Media&Values* magazine and executive director of the Center for Media and Values, Los Angeles. A former high school journalism teacher, she is a graduate of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California.

Advisory Board:

Thanks to the following for their many recommendations and suggestions:

Gordon Berry, Ed.D / School of Education, U. of California, Los Angeles
William J. Cirone / Superintendent, Santa Barbara County Schools, CA
Ellen B. De Franco / Author, *Your Children and TV*, Los Angeles
Barry Duncan / President, Association for Media Literacy, Toronto
Allana Flovson, PhD / Psychologist and educational consultant, Los Angeles
Stewart Hoover, PhD / University of Colorado, Boulder, CO
Jeffrey Mahan, PhD / Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL
Saundra McMillan, PhD / California State University, Long Beach, CA
Kathryn Montgomery, PhD / Campaign for Kids TV, Washington, DC
Judith Myers-Walls, PhD / Dept. of Child Development, Purdue University, Lafayette, IN

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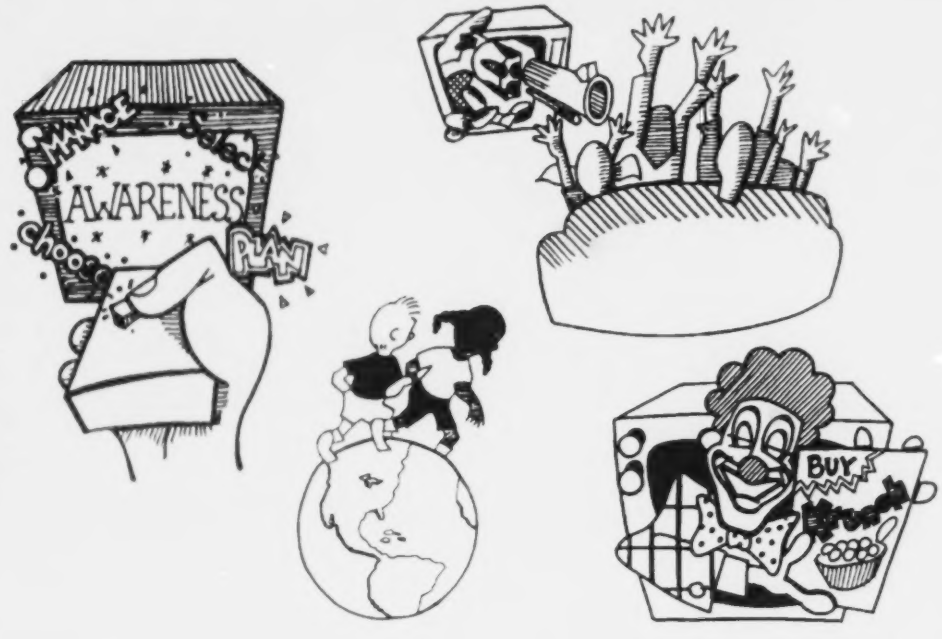
What You Need to Know to Lead This Workshop

Parenting in a TV Age



Most adults believe that TV has undesirable effects on children, but parents know little about what the effects are and how to deal with them. *Parenting in a TV Age* is designed to fill this gap. It will help parents begin thinking and talking about what children see on TV and the lessons television teaches.

If you're like many people, you probably don't take TV very seriously. You may not even notice if the TV is on or off. But the fact is, most family TVs are on a lot — as much as seven hours or more a day. Much of that viewing is done by children. The average pre-school child watches approximately 25 hours a week and by the time most children graduate from high school they will have spent nearly three years in front of the set.

TV has also transformed family habits. It has quietly altered when and how we eat meals, when we go to bed, what we do with our free time, how we supervise and entertain our children. Perhaps more significantly, television affects attitudes about ourselves and the world.

As adults, it's easy to deny that television has any impact on us. But when we hear our children singing commercial jingles or see them play-acting TV characters, they remind us that we are all influenced by TV more than we like to think.

Now let's be fair. Television can offer children a valuable, albeit vicarious, experience of many things they will never have the chance to see for themselves. But like eating, sleeping, and physical exercise, TV viewing needs to be managed. *Parenting In A TV Age* offers exercises and activities that clarify television's impact and provide ways for parents to constructively intervene.

The workshop sessions draw on articles published in the special double issue of *Media&Values* magazine, ***Children and Television: Growing Up In a Media World.*** These essays explore the innumerable ways in which broadcast television, cable, and home video affect children and family life. The sessions suggest how to manage TV viewing so that parents and their children get the best that television has to offer, while minimizing TV's negative side effects.

> ***"TV takes our kids across the globe before parents give them permission to cross the street."***
>
> **Joshua Meyrowitz, *Media&Values* #52-53**
> ***"Children and Television: Growing Up In a Media World"***

By participating in the workshop, parents will have a chance to reflect on TV's impact in their own lives as well as its impact on society as a whole. We often think of TV as a take-it-or-leave-it giant, an anonymous source of news and entertainment. But the truth is that although we may

not be able to change what comes into our homes over the airwaves — at least not overnight — we *can change* the way we and our children relate to what is presented. The only question is whether we choose to exercise that ability.

How to Use *Parenting in a TV Age*

Parenting in A TV Age is ideally used as a series of four 2-hour sessions, held weekly. This allows time for ideas learned in the workshop to be "tried out" with children at home.

Who Should Sponsor and Attend

PTAs, parent support groups, community centers, churches and synagogues, women's clubs and men's groups, colleges and adult education centers are all possible sponsors.

The workshop instructions are designed for groups of 25-40 participants who will most likely be primary care givers of young children — parents or, with some adaptation, grandparents. If more than 40 people wish to attend, it is best to hold two sessions or have a team co-lead the sessions. For effective group facilitation, a single leader should have no more than 40 participants unless the leader is experienced at large group facilitation.

Who Can Lead the Sessions

Any experienced teacher, leader or group facilitator should be able to effectively lead the *Parenting in a TV Age* sessions. No special expertise in media or communications is required. It is important, however, for leaders to carefully prepare each session, reading the recommended background articles in *Media&Values* magazine and preparing materials, including videotaping from television and/or copying handouts, as suggested.

In organizing the workshop, you may want to use some exercises and not others depending on your group and time limits. Note that each session concludes with an *Action* segment so that parents can "take home" new ways they and their children can relate to television.

Optional Ways to Organize

- If you can only schedule one session, plan to use the introductory Session One.
- A day-long event could be arranged by scheduling the first session for the morning. Depending on the number of participants, you may have to have several groups going through Session One at the same time. Then let participants choose one afternoon Workshop from among Sessions Two, Three or Four. This arrangement would require several leaders to prepare the different sessions.

The Four Sessions:

1. Session One — ***Five Important Ideas To Teach Your Kids About TV*** provides guidance to parents on how they can intervene in television's effect on their children. The session covers five key concepts about television that participants can teach children. These key concepts are fundamental principles of media literacy as developed by media teachers and researchers in the field.[1]

2. Session Two — ***The Selling of Our Children: Coping With Commercials*** provides an in-depth exploration of advertising. Parents will learn to identify common ad strategies used to sell products to children and explore how commercials influence children's desires and values.

3. Session Three — ***How Much Is Too Much?: Setting Family Standards for Violent Content*** zeroes in on the problem of television violence. The session is designed to help participants identify how violence in children's programming — particularly cartoons — influences children's conceptions of the world.

4. Session Four — ***Getting Involved: The Children's Television Act of 1990*** focuses on recently passed legislation in the United States. Parents will learn what the law requires of broadcasters and what parents can do to insure that broadcasters provide responsible television for children.

Key Concepts in *Parenting in a TV Age*

Below are some key concepts that should be addressed in the sessions.

In Session One:

Perhaps the most important idea to encourage in parents is that television is not the authority in their house. *They are.* As children grow up, they look for role models. Their behavior is influenced by what they see on TV, but *children are far more influenced by things that adults, parents, and older friends say and do.* In fact, parental interpretation of a TV program can make even the worst show a positive learning experience. Emphasize that parents can learn how to do this once they understand the

five important ideas children should know about TV.

Second, children don't just watch "children's television." Most children also watch prime-time TV. In fact, children often enjoy prime time shows since these programs reveal the mysterious and secret world of grown ups, a world of tension, violence, fear and sex. A study conducted by the Planned Parenthood Association discovered that TV is one of the leading sources of information for teens about sex. By watching soap operas, children learn about lust. By watching afternoon talk shows, they hear about incest and prostitution. By watching the news, they pick up information about rape, murder and crime. Encourage parents to become aware of how much non-children's television their children watch.

Another interesting fact to share with parents is the relationship between TV-watching and health. A recent study conducted by pediatrician William Dietz, M.D., concluded that children who watch lots of TV are more likely to be overweight and depressed.[2]

In Session Two:

The focus of session two is *TV is a commercial business.* This means far more than that every few minutes commercials interrupt TV shows. Participants should come away from this session understanding that television sells audiences, *target audiences* like themselves and their children, to advertisers.

By treating children like consumers, television exploits an especially gullible audience. As James McNeal points out in his essay *From Savers to Spenders* (*Media&Values*, p. 4), children are actually three markets in one:

1) They spend their own money.
2) They influence the way their parents spend money.
3) They are a future market for all types of goods and services.

In Session Three:

Many parents are disturbed by the *content* of television. Violence, in particular, will be a central concern of many. The issue is not so much that children will imitate the violence they see but that, as Nancy Signorielli points out on page 23 of *Media&Values*, children will cultivate violence-related conceptions about the world.

Session three focuses on this concern by addressing the violence of cartoons. Why cartoons and not prime-time violence? Because many children prefer to watch cartoons more than any other type of programming (and parents let them) — it is *their TV*. By analyzing the typical cartoon plot — which presupposes a violent world where only power saves the good guys — parents can begin to see the importance of what their children are learning from TV, even in shows as "innocuous" as cartoons.

Learning to deal with violence in cartoons gives parents the tools to analyze other problematic content areas like sex and prime-time violence.

In Session Four:

Session Four encourages parents to convert their private concerns into public action. Participants begin by learning the main provisions of the United States' Children's Television Act of 1990, then go through a process of clarifying their thoughts about the kinds of children's programming that they would like to see on TV.

This is an important session because participants must call on their opinions and unique perspectives to decide *for themselves* what are the educational and informational needs of children. Be sure to encourage use of all the tools parents have gained in the first three sessions.

Some groups, especially Canadian groups, may prefer to spend more time on personal issues raised by the first three sessions. We encourage you to be alert to the needs of your group. See page 22 for alternative suggestions for this session.

Suggestions for Leading The Workshops

Before leading any of the sessions, we suggest that you read the enclosed document *From Awareness to Action: Media Literacy for the '90s*. This document outlines the educational strategy and philosophy of media literacy as developed by the Center for Media and Values. It suggests many ways to make your workshop more effective.

A few other suggestions and comments may help as you prepare to lead *Parenting In A TV Age*:

- The Leader's Guide is designed so that you may hold it in one hand as you lead each session. You'll probably also want to make notes in the left column or highlight important questions or instructions with a bright-colored marker — whatever makes the plans easiest to follow.

- The left column of the Leader's Guide provides a quick outline of the session. If you've read the material through two or three times, you should be able to lead the sessions mainly from this outline. The right column gives more detailed information, like discussion questions and directions to the group. Suggested language has been prepared for giving group instructions (particularly in parts *A* and *B*) but feel free to put the ideas in your own words.

- The sessions call for you to pre-record several TV shows. Naturally, some television samples work better

"Children don't necessarily understand everything they see on television, but they are exposed to many aspects of the adult world that parents might not have decided to tell them about."

Joshua Meyrowitz, *Media&Values* #52-53
"Children and Television: Growing Up In a Media World"

than others. You may look for a particularly salient example for discussion and analysis purposes or you may choose to work with whatever your VCR happens to record. Either way you'll find you have plenty to talk about. Be sure to note the copyright regulations explained on page seven of *Media Literacy for the '90s*.

- Nobody likes talking about children as much as parents, and these workshops can generate a lot of energy. Make use of parent enthusiasm and expertise. Also, try to remember that no one cares more or tries harder than parents. Your role is not to tell parents that they have been making mistakes, but to open up questions for exploration and action. Allow participants to share their own experiences and apply the workshops' lessons to their own lives.

- You'll quickly find that parental attitudes about TV differ from person to person. Some parents are deeply concerned and strictly control what their children watch; others may be more permissive. A quick litmus test on parental attitudes toward television can be conducted by asking participants how many TV sets they own. In general, research indicates that the more sets in the household, the less control there is over TV viewing and the more permissive parents will be about television-watching. [3,4]

- Some people have simply decided that all television is "bad" and that "good homes" shouldn't even have a TV set. Let them air their opinion, but suggest that our media culture is far more pervasive than what comes just through television. Children are exposed to these cultural influences (through peers, at school, in other homes) whether their parents let them watch TV at home or not. We may wish otherwise, but television is a daily reality in most children's lives. The purpose of these workshops is to deal *constructively* with TV. How will children learn clear values in the midst of a media world if their parents do not guide them?

- Finally, the "TV Age" referred to in this kit refers not only to broadcast television but also commercial and non-commercial cable TV, videocassettes and even movies. Although cable and video do provide more choices and some alternatives, they are not available in all homes and they are not totally problem-free. Encourage parents to use the tools of media literacy for *all* media forms.

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Evaluations

Evaluations are a leader's best friend. Make sure to leave five to ten minutes at the end of each workshop session to get feedback that will improve your effectiveness. Evaluations will also make it apparent which concepts participants understood best.

An evaluation form is included in the booklet of handouts, but your evaluation can also take the form of a frank discussion at the end of the session. Ask participants which sections worked best, reviewing each exercise in turn. Pause after asking the question, allowing time for participants to formulate and call out their thoughts. Encourage them to make specific suggestions for improving the session.

Or, on a piece of paper, ask participants to complete the statement "My lasting impression of this session was that..." and "The one thing I would change about this workshop is...."

References:

1. See Masterman, Len. *Teaching the Media*. (1985). Routledge, 29 W. 35th St., New York, NY 10001-2291; 212-244-6412. Canadian toll free: 800-634-7064. U.S.$15.95.

2. Dietz, William H. and Strasburger, Victor C. "Children, Adolescents, and Television," *Current Problems in Pediatrics*. January 1991. pp. 8-31. This article also provides an excellent comprehensive review of all relevant research related to children and television.

3. Christopher, F. Scott, Fabes, Richard A. and Wilson, Patricia M. "Family Television Viewing: Implications for Family Life Education," *Family Relations*, April 1989, p. 210-214.

4. Fabes, Richard A., Wilson, Patricia M, and Christopher, F. Scott. "A Time To Reexamine The Role of Television in Family Life," *Family Relations*, July 1989, pp. 337-341.

For additional resources on children and television, see references cited on page 31 and throughout *Media&Values* #52-53 on ***Children and Television: Growing Up in a Media World***.

SESSION **1**

Parenting in a TV Age

Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV

Objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- More effectively manage their children's TV-watching.
- Explain, in their own words, the five important ideas to teach children about TV.
- Name at least three strategies for making the five ideas clear to their children.

Leader Preparation:

- In ***Children and Television: Growing Up in a Media World***, read:
  Altered States (pages 2-3)
  Wired Bedrooms (page 11)
  Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV (pages 16-19)
  One Mother's Solution (page 21)
  Choosing the Right Tape For Your Child (page 26)
- Prepare the room so that participants can break up easily into groups of four to six.

Materials Needed:

- One copy of ***Media Literacy for the '90s*** for your reference.
- Copies of these handouts for all participants:
  #1: *Taking Charge: Strategies for Parenting in a TV Age*
  #2: *Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV*
  #3: *Tube Turn-Ons*
  If you will continue with a second session: *#4: Family Viewing Diary* (make extra copies, as some participants may want to take two to three of these with them).
  Optional: *Making the Media Work For You* (Sample included in kit. Order additional copies from the Center for Media and Values in packets of 25 or 100.).
- Large tablet paper (or blank newsprint — at least two pages per group), markers and masking tape for each group of four to six. Save time by tearing off pieces of tape and placing them on walls around the room before the session.
- Large tablet paper and markers or chalkboard and chalk for the leader.
- Optional: Pens or pencils and paper for all participants.

Required Time:

- 2 hours

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1. Introduction
(10-15 minutes)

A. Welcome participants!

Tell a little about Parenting in a TV Age and about plans for future sessions.

B. Describe the introductory activity.

We will each find a partner whom we don't already know (if possible) and:

- Introduce ourselves to our partner,
- Name the TV show we remember as our first favorite from years ago, and
- Tell our partner what we hope to learn in this session.
- Then, after two to three minutes, we'll introduce our partner to the rest of the group, telling our partner's name, first favorite TV show and what our partner hopes to learn in this session.

C. Divide into pairs.

Allow a few minutes (two to three) for pairs to introduce themselves (including you!).

D. Partner introductions.

Call the group back together for partner introductions.

E. State the goals of the session.

- To learn strategies for more effectively managing your children's TV watching.
- To learn five important ideas to teach children about TV.
- To leave the session committed to teach our children at least one of the ideas in a specific activity.

It's also a good idea to let people know if you won't be addressing something they hoped to accomplish in this session.

2. Awareness
(20 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the first activity.

To learn strategies for more effectively managing our children's TV watching.

B. Describe the first activity.

We will break up into groups of four to six and read the handout *Taking Charge: Strategies for Parenting in a TV Age*, then answer the following questions:

Write the questions at right on board or tablet paper as you talk.

- Which of these ideas have you tried before?
- How did you do it?
- What response did it elicit in your children?
- How did it change your children's interaction with TV?

C. Divide into groups of four to six.

Pass out the handout *Taking Charge: Strategies for Parenting in a TV Age*. Allow time for group activity.

D. Group Reports.

Ask members of each group to name one or two ideas that they've tried that were particularly successful with their children.

3. Analysis
(20-30 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the next activity.

To learn five important ideas to teach our children about TV. These ideas work well as a way of organizing *structured activities*.

B. Describe the activity.

We are going to go over the handout *Five Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV* together. I will be clarifying and explaining the ideas (with your help).

C. Pass out the handout "Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV." Go over it point by point.

Read each idea, discuss and explain. Note that the five ideas are the same as the five principles of media literacy on page three of ***Media Literacy for the '90s***, and on pages 16-19 in ***Media&Values***, though in a slightly different order.

Possible discussion questions:

- What other points might have been made? How might they be included in one of the five ideas?
- What difference do you think it will make in your children's lives when they understand these ideas?

4. Reflection

(25-35 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the next activity.

To "translate" the five ideas into language appropriate for our children.

B. Describe the activity.

In small groups of four to six, we will restate the *Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV* in language appropriate to one of the following four age-groups of children: children 4-7, 8-10, 11-14 and 15-17 years old. We will then write our new five ideas on large paper and tape these to the walls so other groups can see them.

C. Divide into groups.

You'll need at least four groups so that all age groups are covered. Let participants choose which age group they're most interested in by show of hands or by having them move to corners of the room. Then, divide each smaller group into groups of four to six if needed. Give each group a marker and at least one sheet of tablet paper or newsprint. You may also want to give all participants paper and pencils for notes.

D. Start the activity.

Visit various groups, checking progress. Some will need more help than others. As groups write down their translations, be sure each group writes the age group they are targeting at the top of the page. If one or two groups finish before others, ask them to try translating the ideas for another age group of their choice. Be sure all lists are taped to walls.

E. Wrap up.

Ask participants to browse through the room looking at each others' lists, taking notes if they wish. Then, ask participants to return to their small groups and ask a few questions *of the entire group*, like:

- Which idea was hardest to translate for your group and why?
- What was most helpful about this activity? Most difficult?

5. Action

(10-15 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the final activity.

To commit to try at least one *structured activity* which will help each of us teach one of the five important ideas to our children.

B. Describe the activity.

In our same small groups of four to six, we will read the handout *Tube Turn-Ons*, then share with our groups which ideas we like and why. Then, we will name other similar activities that we think would work with our children, each choosing one activity to try before the next session.

C. Pass out "Tube Turn-Ons."

Visit various groups. Encourage participants to commit to try one activity with their children.

D. Wrap up.

Ask several participants to share with the larger group what activity they are going to try before the next session. You may want to guess which of the five important ideas they'll try to teach with the activity they've chosen. Be sure to let participants know they'll have a few minutes to discuss their attempt at the next session.

Also, encourage participants to read and share the *Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV* with friends, family and co-workers!

6. Evaluation and Closing

(5-10 minutes)

A. Evaluation

Get feedback for improving future sessions. Use the evaluation form provided in the handout booklet or obtain verbal feedback.

B. Possible Closing:

- If participants will be returning for a second session:
  Pass out the *Family Viewing Diary* handout. Ask participants to use it to keep track of their viewing for three to seven days before the next session. Tell participants that they will need at least one diary for each TV in their house (encourage participants to take extra copies if they need them — or they can make their own diaries). If your sessions are not at least four days apart, ask participants to fill out the diary with estimates.
- Optional: Distribute *Making the Media Work For You* and suggest that participants use its questions in their homes.
- Ask for any remaining questions.
- Thanks to participants.
- Preview next session: *The Selling of Our Children: Coping With Commercials.*

SESSION **2**

Parenting in a TV Age

The Selling of Our Children: Coping With Commercials

Objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- List three ways that children are treated as a consumer market by advertisers.
- Identify five of the most common persuasion strategies used in advertisements directed toward children.
- Identify key values to which advertisements appeal when directed at children.
- Take action to reduce the effectiveness of ads on their children.

Leader Preparation:

- In ***Children and Television: Growing Up In a Media World***, read:
  From Savers to Spenders (pages 4-6)
  Sneakers That Kill (page 7)
  Growing Up In a Media World (pages 8-10)
  Dealing With Death (page 28)
- Record a children's commercial TV show (non-PBS program). Include the commercials. Cue the tape to a block of commercials.

Materials Needed:

- A VCR and TV monitor, with a VCR remote control if possible.
- Copies of the following handouts for all participants:
  #5: *Ten Common Advertising Strategies in Commercials Targeted to Children*
  #6: *The Child Market*
- Pens or pencils and paper for all participants.
- A large writing tablet and markers or blackboard and chalk for the leader.

Required Time:

1 1/2 to 2 hours.

Important Note:

If you plan to address the United States' Children's Television Act of 1990 in session four (as the leader's guide does), you'll need to do the following now:

- Call a local television station to find out what show(s) they say are designed to meet the educational and informational needs of children as described in the Children's Television Act. Do this now so you'll have time to record the show. See session four's "Leader Preparation" section (page 19) for more information.

1. Introduction

(15-25 minutes)

A. Welcome participants and ask for reports on structured activities that they tried.

Possible discussion questions:

- What did you try?
- Which part(s) of the activity worked best? Which parts did not work?
- What did your children learn?
- How might you adjust the activity so that it would work better next time? Ask for group suggestions!

B. Ask participants to pair off and share their family diaries with partners.

If participants did not fill out their diaries, ask them to share what they or family members watched on TV since the last session, including *what kinds of commercials* did their children see most often? If participants brought their diaries, here are some possible discussion questions and topics:

- What patterns do you see in your partner's diary?
- For example, does anyone in your partner's household seem to watch more TV than others? Is anyone watching alone?
- What kinds of commercials (i.e., toys, detergents, etc.) do you think the children in your partner's household see most often? Why?
- What patterns would you like to change in your home, and which patterns do you like?

C. Group discussion.

Possible discussion questions with the entire group after sharing diary entries in pairs:

- What did you learn from keeping a television diary?
- What kinds of commercials do your children see most often? How are the commercials they watch reflected in their desires for toys, food, clothes or other consumer products?
- How did your family use the TV over the course of the week? Prompt the group with these phrases, if necessary: babysitter, dinner guest, best friend, companion, source of relaxation, a way of passing time.
- What did you learn about your family's opinion of television?

D. State the goals of the session:

- To explain the way that marketers view the child audience.
- To learn several strategies advertisers use to sell products to our children.
- To identify key values to which advertisements appeal when directed at our children.
- To commit to try one action to reduce the effectiveness of ads directed to our children.

2. Awareness

(15 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the first activity.

To explain the way that marketers view the child audience.

B. Describe the activity.

We will read and discuss the handout, *The Child Market*, which identifies the following target groups:

Write the categories at right on board or tablet paper.

- Current Market
- Future Market
- Influentials

C. Pass out "The Child Market."

Read the text on the handout with the group. Briefly review the spending percentages. The text is from the article *From Savers to Spenders: How Children Became a Consumer Market*, page 4.

D. Discuss.

Possible discussion questions:

- How do your children spend their money?
- Where and how do you think they learned to spend money the way they do?
- If you were an advertising executive, what products would you advertise during Saturday morning cartoons? Why?

3. Analysis

(25-35 minutes)

A. Describe the purpose of the next activity.

To learn several strategies advertisers use to sell products to our children.

B. Describe the activity.

In small groups of four to six, we will review a list of common advertising strategies, suggesting examples of each. Then, while watching a group of commercials from children's TV programming, we will together list advertising strategies that appear in the commercials.

C. Divide into groups of four to six.

Distribute the handout *Ten Common Advertising Strategies in Commercials Targeted to Children*. Allow a few minutes for groups to read the handout. Suggest *one or two* of these ideas, questions or other ideas as short discussion-starters in small groups:

- Think of a commercial you've seen that uses one or more of these advertising strategies. Describe the commercial and its use of the strategy.
- Which of these strategies seems most unfair when directed at young children? Why?

D. De-brief with the entire group.

Call groups together. Ask for *short* reports from a few individuals.

E. Describe the next activity.

We will watch a block of commercials recorded during Saturday morning cartoons, listing techniques on the board (or tablet paper).

F. Review the block of commercials.

Stop the videotape after each commercial to give participants time to suggest advertising strategies they saw used. List these on board or tablet paper. Review the commercial a second time if needed (use your remote control if you have one). You'll probably only have time for three to five commercials.

G. Talk about the activity.

Possible discussion questions:

- How does *seeing* the techniques make you more or less concerned about them than before?
- Which one or two techniques seem most important to teach *your* child? Why?

4. Reflection

(25 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the next activity.

To identify key values to which advertisements directed at children appeal.

B. Describe the activity. Write the list at right on a board or tablet paper.

We will view the same block of commercials we watched earlier, this time looking for the underlying *values* of each commercial. For example, in order to "fall" for a commercial's directive to buy a product, would our children have to believe in acquisitiveness, family, bravery, military might, generosity, beauty, monetary success, popularity? Something else?

C. Rewind and start the video again.

Encourage participants to call out values they see as they watch. List these on board or tablet paper as they are stated. List repeating values as often as they occur. Stop the video or rewind portions if necessary.

D. Wrap up.

Possible discussion questions:

- What are the most common values to which these commercials appeal? Are these indicative of the values of most commercials directed at children? Why or why not?
- How do the commercials use emotion to sell products and values to children?
- How would you use the same advertising strategies if you were an advertiser?
- Critics of children's television have complained that many cartoons and other children's shows are simply 30-minute commercials. Which shows do you think are "program-length commercials?" Why? What values do these shows communicate?

5. Action

(10-15 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the final activity.

To commit to trying one action to reduce the effectiveness of ads directed to our children and reporting back at the next session.

B. Describe the activity.

We will brainstorm possible ways of teaching to our children the ideas we've learned in this session. Then, we will choose one idea that we like in order to try it and report back at the next session about its effectiveness.

C. State the rules for brainstorming.

See *Media Literacy for the '90s*, page six for the rules for brainstorming.

D. Ask participants to complete this sentence:

"To teach our children about the values or techniques of advertisers, I could..." Write group suggestions on the board or on tablet paper! Examples:

- Watch TV with my children and point out techniques used in commercials.
- Talk with my children about the values communicated through advertisements.
- Record a bunch of commercials from Saturday morning TV, then do the same exercise with my child that we've done here.
- Predict with my children the kinds of commercials that will come on during a particular show, watch the show, then discuss why we were right or wrong.

E. Ask participants to commit to trying one of the ideas.

Ask participants to choose one of the brainstormed ideas (or one of their own not mentioned) to try before the next session. This might also be a good time to suggest that the group plan a time to watch the video *Buy Me That!* with their children (see *Follow-up Action Ideas* on page 23 of this leader's guide booklet).

6. Evaluation and Closing

(5-10 minutes)

A. Evaluation

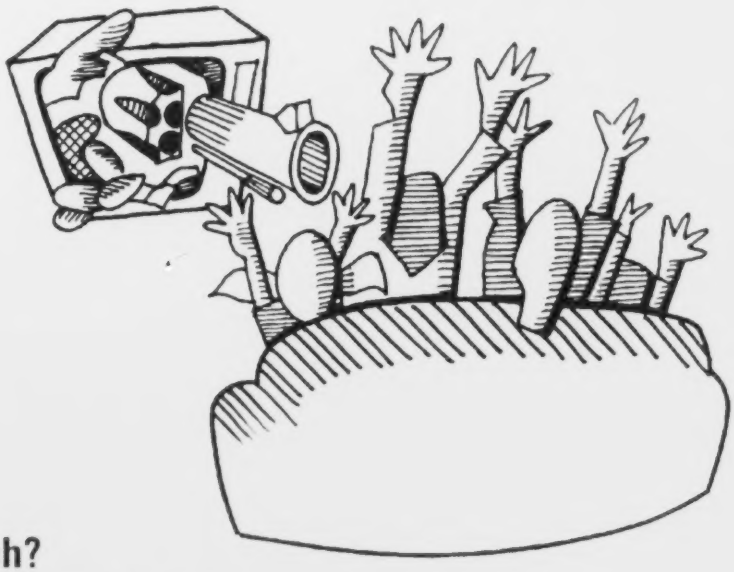
Get feedback for improving future sessions. Use the enclosed evaluation form provided in the handout booklet or obtain verbal feedback.

B. Possible Closing:

- Ask everyone to stand in a circle, then ask for a few volunteers to tell which idea they are going to attempt with their children before the next session. You go first!
- Tell participants that we will begin the next session with a short report about our experiences.
- Ask for any remaining questions.
- Thanks to participants.
- Preview next session, titled: *How Much Is Too Much?: Setting Family Standards for Violent Content*.

SESSION **3**

Parenting in a TV Age



How Much Is Too Much? Setting Family Standards for Violent Content

Objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain to others why violence in cartoons disturbs or does not disturb them.
- Establish guidelines for appropriate use of violence in a TV show, movie or documentary.
- Assess violent content in TV programming or movies.
- Decide how to respond to their childrens' desire to watch violent programs.

Leader Preparation:

- In ***Children and Television: Growing Up In a Media World***, read:
  Altered States (pages 2-3)
  Creating Cartoons (pages 12-13)
  Confessions of A TV Sitcom Producer (page 20)
  Quiz and Questions Probe Impact of TV Violence (page 22)
  Researcher Reviews Violence Concerns (page 23)
- Record a "superhero" children's cartoon *without the commercials* (use the pause button on your VCR to "zap" them as you record). There are many appropriate cartoons, including *Captain Planet*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Popeye*, *ProStars* and *Spacecats*. Read the handout *The Cartoon Plot* to help determine which shows will work best for this session's activities. Most cartoons will work, but try to choose one that parallels the description on the handout in a straightforward manner.
- Choose one story from the show to use as an example for your group. Ideally, the story should be less than 10 minutes in length. Since a 30-minute show usually has two or three stories plus commercials, the 10-minute limit should not be too difficult. Cue the tape to the story in preparation to show it to your group. Do not plan to show a 22-minute story to your group!

Materials Needed:

- VCR, monitor and prepared videotape.
- Paper and at least two 3x5 index cards and pens or pencils for all participants.
- Copies of the handout #7: *The Cartoon Plot* for all participants.
- Large tablet paper and markers or blackboard and chalk for the leader.
- Evaluation materials.

Required Time:

2 hours.

1. Introduction

(10-15 minutes)

A. Welcome participants and ask for reports on activities they tried to teach their children about commercials.

Possible discussion questions:

- What did you try?
- Which part(s) of the activity worked best? Which parts did not work at all?
- What did your children learn?
- How might you adjust the activity so that it would work better next time? Ask for group suggestions!

B. State the goals of the session:

- To compare the degree to which violence in a cartoon disturbs us compared to violence in movies or action-adventure programs.
- To critique the role of violence in a typical children's cartoon plot.
- To clarify when violence is appropriate on TV by developing some guidelines for tolerance of violence on TV.
- To commit to use the guidelines to assess the TV violence of one show with our children before the next session.

2. Awareness

(30-40 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the first activity.

To compare the degree to which violence in a cartoon disturbs us compared to violence in other types of shows.

B. Describe the activity.

We will watch one children's cartoon, noting violent scene(s) and our emotional response to them. We will then share some of our responses, trying to measure the relative "troublesomeness" of violence in the cartoon we have watched.

C. Give a definition of violence:

First your group may need a definition of violence with which to work. Communications scholar George Gerbner has said that violence is *the overt expression of physical force against others or self, or the compelling of action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing.* Write this definition on board or tablet paper if necessary. Some participants may wish to challenge the definition, but don't get bogged down in a long discussion here.

D. Pass out paper and pens or pencils.

Ask participants to note on paper as they watch, 1) violent scenes and 2) a word or two about their emotional reaction to the violence. Also, ask for three volunteers to take special notes on the *plot* of the cartoon. Tell them these notes will be used later in the session.

E. Watch the cartoon.

F. Ask a few participants to share their notes about the violence portrayed.

Encourage several participants to share violent scenes and their emotional responses to them. Possible discussion questions and ideas:

- Explain why you reacted the way you did to that scene.
- Tell us about a time when you felt a similar emotional response (non-TV related).
- How do your children respond to these images?

G. As a group, put the violence of the cartoon on a spectrum.

Draw a horizontal line on board or *horizontal* tablet paper. Write "troublesome" at one end and "not so troublesome" at the other end. Then ask participants to decide where to place the cartoon and other shows (or types of shows) on the spectrum. Encourage friendly debate. For example, in which show is violence more troublesome:

- Cartoons or cop shows?
- *The Three Stooges* or cartoons?

- Soap operas or *Rambo*?
- Slasher movies or Vietnam War footage?
- A German concentration camp documentary or soap operas?
- Others? What should be on the ends of the spectrum?

Participants may have many differing viewpoints. Watch the time and move on the the next activity.

3. Analysis

(30 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the next activity.

To critique the role of violence in a typical children's cartoon plot.

B. Describe the activity.

We will read a handout, *The Children's Cartoon Plot*, then analyze the cartoon we've just seen. Then, we will discuss what we think our children learn from this common cartoon plot.

C. Pass out the handout.

Go over the handout with the group, then as a group decide whether the plot of the cartoon follows this typical plot. Those who took notes about the plot of the cartoon can be helpful in clearing up group disagreements. Or, watch portions of the cartoon over again. Possible discussion questions and ideas:

- Describe the point in the cartoon when each of the four steps in the plot take place.
- How does the cartoon differ from the plot on the handout?
- What other cartoons do you know that follow the typical plot?
- What cartoons do you know of that do not seem to follow the plot? Think of examples from your childhood.
- Do even these less "normal" cartoons have elements of the typical plot?
- What other common characteristics of cartoon plots or characters can you think of? (Examples: enemies have dark skin and speak with accents, commercials usually happen at tension-filled moments, etc.)

D. Talk about the implications of the cartoon plot.

If a child watched only cartoons, what kind of world view would she or he develop? Possible discussion questions:

- What are your children's fears?
- What are the fears of characters in cartoons? Compare and contrast these with your children's fears.
- If a child were to assume that the "real" world is like the cartoon world, who would play the role of the super hero? the villian?
- According to cartoons, how must one deal with conflict?
- How has this discussion of the cartoon plot changed your view of the place of cartoon violence on our violence spectrum?

You may want to share with participants Nancy Signorielli's summary of adult concerns about violence on page 23 of ***Children and Television: Growing Up in a Media World***.

4. Reflection

(20-25 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the next activity.

To clarify when violence is appropriate on TV by developing some guidelines for tolerance of violence on TV.

B. Describe the activity.

We will brainstorm suggestions for completing the sentence: "I can tolerate violence on TV when..." Then we will discuss which answers seem valid and why.

C. Brainstorming activity.

State the rules for brainstorming (see page six of ***Media Literacy for the '90s***). Write the phrase "I can tolerate violence on TV more easily when..." on board or tablet paper. To get your group started, you may need to prompt them with some suggestions like:

- "...the violence is essential to the plot."
- "...the violence is not too bloody."
- "...the long-term consequences of the violence are shown."
- "...other *effective* ways of solving conflicts besides violence are seen."
- "...violence is used as the last resort."

D. "Committee" role-play.

Ask participants to pretend they are part of a committee charged with drawing up a set of guidelines for making violence on TV more acceptable (How would content of violent shows have to change?). One way to do this is ask *Which three statements of those listed should be requirements for violent content on children's television?*

E. Wrap up.

Stop the debate while things are still lively. Suggest that these might be great guidelines for deciding what violent content is acceptable in participants' homes.

5. Action

(10-15 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the final activity.

To commit to use the guidelines to assess the TV violence of one show with our children before the next session.

B. Describe the activity.

We will write down at least one way of using the guidelines we've developed (your choice which guidelines to use) in teaching our children about violence on television before the next session. Then, those who feel comfortable will share their ideas with everyone.

C. Pass out two index cards to each person.

Tell participants that you are giving each of them two index cards — one to write down an idea they may try before the next session, and one for personal notes — to write down, for example, the "committee" guidelines with which they agree. Then, allow a few minutes for participants to write down one idea for using the guidelines to teach their children about violence on TV before the next session. Suggest that participants consider incorporating other activities from this session.

D. Reports.

Ask for everyone who feels comfortable to quickly explain their idea(s) so participants can "steal" ideas from each other. Encourage everyone to take notes. When most all have shared, tell participants that there will be a time for reporting on our experiences at the beginning of the next session.

6. Evaluation and Closing

(10-15 minutes)

A. Evaluation

Get feedback for improving future sessions. Use the enclosed evaluation form provided in the handout booklet or obtain verbal feedback.

B. Possible Closing:

- Possible homework for those interested: How can we apply the same process we used tonight in dealing with sex or other questionable content? Report at the next session!
- Gather in a circle. Go around the group, asking participants to name a person who influenced their values about violence or non-violence (for example, Mohandas Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., a relative or friend), then name one quality about that person that they admire.
- Ask for any remaining questions.

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SESSION **4**

Parenting in a TV Age

Getting Involved: The Children's Television Act of 1990

Objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:
- Explain the Children's Television Act of 1990.
- Define the "educational and informational needs of children."
- State how they believe local stations can effectively meet these needs.
- Begin a community action campaign aimed at improving the quality of children's television in their communities.

Leader Preparation:

- In ***Children and Television: Growing Up In a Media World***, read:
  Altered States (pages 2-3)
  Action and Activism (pages 14-15)
- Call a local television station to find out what show(s) they say are designed to meet the educational and informational needs of children as described in the Children's Television Act of 1990. You'll probably want to speak to someone in the community relations department. This may take several phone calls over several days. If you have difficulty with one station, try another. Be sure to find out the day and time of the show. Also inquire about what year the station's license comes up for renewal. All stations are renewed every five years on a revolving schedule by state.
- Once you've identified a show, record it with a VCR. Then choose a five-minute segment of it to show to your group. Look for a segment that reflects the intentions of the show. Cue the videotape to the beginning of the segment.
- Arrange the room so the group can easily divide into small groups of four to six and return to the large group.

Materials Needed:

- VCR, monitor and pre-recorded videotape.
- Copies of the following handouts for all participants:
  #8: *Children's Television Act of 1990*
  #9: *Questions and Guidelines to Evaluate TV Programs for Children*
- Board and chalk or tablet paper (or blank newsprint) and markers for the leader.
- Masking tape for taping group lists to walls. Save time by tearing off pieces of tape beforehand and placing these around the room.)
- Tablet paper and markers for each group of four to six.
- Evaluation materials.

Required Time:

2 hours

Important Note:

This session is organized slightly differently from the preceding three sessions. It begins with an *awareness* activity, then moves directly to a *reflection* activity followed by analysis and action. See page 22 for a list of other possible topics or activities for this session.

1. Introduction
(15-20 minutes)

A. Welcome participants and ask for reports from the last session.

Ask participants what activity they tried with their children using their *guidelines for violent content* from last session. Possible discussion questions:

- What worked?
- What didn't work and why do you think those things didn't work?
- What are some ways we could repeat these activities so that they might work better?

B. Any homework reports?

If anyone in your group volunteered to try to apply the ideas to other questionable content, ask for a short report.

C. State the goals of the session:

- To learn the main provisions of the *Children's Television Act of 1990.*
- To define the "educational and informational needs of children" and how television can best meet these needs.
- To commit to one action step that will encourage a local station to work more deliberately to meet the programming needs of children.

2. Awareness
(15 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the first activity.

To learn the main provisions of the *Children's Television Act of 1990.*

B. Describe the activity.

We will read and discuss a summary of the Act.

C. Pass out the handout "Children's Television Act of 1990."

Go over the two main provisions of the Act with participants. Other related ideas participants may wish to know:

- Television broadcast licenses must be renewed every five years. A station's license renewal date is determined by state.
- The law puts the burden on citizens for its effectiveness. Citizens of a local community have the right to review — and challenge if necessary — a station's performance in limiting advertising in children's programming and in meeting the "entertainment and informational needs of children." Unless a station's claims about how it has satisfied the law are challenged by local citizens, the station's license will likely by renewed regardless of the station's actual performance.

3. Reflection
(40 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the next group of activities.

To define for ourselves what the "educational and informational needs of children" are and how television can best meet these needs.

B. Describe the activity.

We will list important considerations to be included in a definition of the "educational and informational needs of children."

C. Pass out the handout "Questions and Guidelines."

Allow a few minutes for participants to read the handout, then suggest that they use its ideas — and others they think of — to list answers to the following question:

- What issues are important in defining the educational and informational needs of children?

List all ideas on board or tablet paper.

For example, these other possible questions may spark discussion:

- Programming for children must be sensitive to different ages of children. What age-groupings should programming address?
- What *can* TV teach effectively?
- What subjects should children's TV address? Environmental values? Sexuality? Citizenship? Geography?
- Should TV teach children about advertising? For example, analysis of commercials, consumerism and how images are used by advertisers.

D. Describe the next activity. Write "definition" and "expectation" on board or tablet paper.

In small groups of four to six, and using the important considerations we've listed, we will define what we believe are the "educational and informational needs of children" and what we expect of our local TV stations as they try to meet these needs.

E. Divide into groups.

Pass out tablet paper and markers to groups. Visit various groups, encouraging each group to write down preliminary definitions and lists of expectations.

F. Agree on a common definition and expectations.

Call groups back together. Be sure that all groups have posted their definitions and expectations, then ask participants to help you come up with a common definition, one that is acceptable to all groups. Use ideas from all the posted lists. Write the new definition and expectations on board or tablet paper.

4. Analysis

(20-25 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the next activity.

To make a preliminary determination as to whether a show from a local station's programming meets our expectations as we have just defined them.

B. Describe the activity.

We will watch a five-minute segment of a show that a local station says is designed to meet the educational and informational needs of children, then list its strengths and weakness based on our earlier discussions. Finally, we will decide what additional steps need to be taken to determine whether the station is meeting the expectations we have identified.

C. List and discuss strengths and weaknesses of the show.

Possible discussion questions:

- Which of our expectations does this five-minute segment address?
- What educational or informational needs does the segment address?
- Based on this short sgement, what needs might you assume are not being addressed in this show?
- Assuming this is the station's only show designed to meet the requirements of the Act, what other kinds of shows are needed to meet other needs we identified? List these on board or tablet paper.

D. Determine what else is needed to assess the station's programming.

Possible discussion questions:

- What else do you know about this station's programming that might help us to decide whether these other needs are being addressed?
- How could we go about making a more secure and fair decision? List ideas on board or tablet paper.

5. Action

(15 minutes)

A. State the purpose of the final activity.

To commit to one action step that will encourage a local station to work more deliberately to meet our expectations of the programming needs of children.

B. Ask participants to choose one or more of the activities at right.

- Ask for volunteers to check more carefully how well the station we dealt with in this session or how well another station is meeting the expectations we defined. Plan to meet in the future to strategize next steps, such as meeting with station management or gathering community support. Choose one person to be in charge!
- Ask someone to send a copy of our definition of *the educational and informational needs of children* to local stations with a letter asking for the stations' policy on how it plans to meet the provisions of the Children's Television Act of 1990. Or send a similar letter to the local newspaper. The person who does this could plan a meeting in the future to talk about responses.
- Write a letter thanking stations that have positive programming for children.
- Ask for a volunteer to take your group's definition and expectations to a local PTA or other community group who will follow up on the ideas.
- Ask for a volunteer to do research to find out what shows are available from independent sources that meet the needs outlined by the group. Then send a letter to stations asking them to pick up particular shows.

See Follow-up Sessions for more ideas on page 23.

6. Evaluation and Closing

(10 minutes)

A. Evaluation

Get feedback for improving future sessions. Use the enclosed evaluation form master or obtain verbal feedback.

B. Possible Closing:

- Gather in a circle. Ask participants to name one important action idea they've learned in the four sessions. Go around the circle until everyone has had a chance to name an action idea.
- Announce further sessions or meetings.
- Thanks to participants.

Alternate Ideas for Session Four or for Additional Sessions

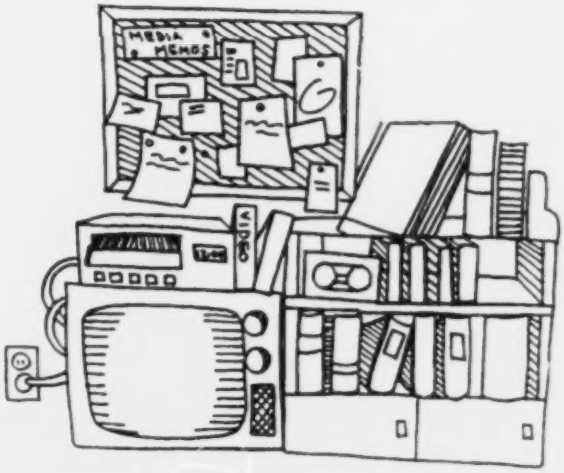
During the first three sessions, many issues may emerge that your group would like to pursue. For example:

- What can parents do when children have temper trantrums in toy stores because they want a toy they've seen advertised?
- What can parents do when children "Ninja-chop" each other?
- What can parents do when a child starts using tough language learned from television?
- What can parents do when spouses disagree as to how television should be controlled in the home?
- What can parents do when friends or relatives are more lax than they are about what their children watch and how long they can watch?
- What about using TV as a tool for reward or punishment?

Try organizing your group into "task forces" to brainstorm ways to handle these issues. Allow time for each group to discuss the topic thoroughly and prepare a summary statement, set of guidelines or recommended action. Allow each group several minutes to report their findings to the whole group.

Follow-up Sessions, Resources, Action Ideas

Parenting in a TV Age



1. Educate Children About TV Commercials.

Buy Me That: A Kids Survival Guide To TV Advertising, is an excellent 30-minute video produced by Home Box Office, Action for Children's Television and *Consumer Reports*. It features humorous vignettes that explain to children the tricks used in commercials.

Check your public library or educational resource center to see if the video is available for use by community groups. If not, request that it be purchased or strategize ways to raise the money to purchase it.

Then, design a presentation to share *Buy Me That* throughout your community. Contact community centers, PTAs, breakfast and luncheon groups, churches and synagogues to get adults excited about showing it to children. Excellent for an intergenerational gathering. Order from Films Inc., 5547 N. Ravenswood Avenue, Chicago, IL 60640-1199 (312) 878-2600. Price: $79. And watch for ***Buy Me That, II*** to be released in 1992.

- Another good resource for kids is ***Zillions***, a magazine published by *Consumer Reports*. It features games, cartoons, and illustrations designed to make kids savvier about advertising. Subscribe for your children or grandchildren. Consider a gift subscription for school libraries. Subscriptions: $13.95/year. Write: *Zillions*. P.O. Box 54861, Boulder, CO 80322-4861.

2. Organize to Influence Local Children's TV.

If your group is interested in following up on Session Four's dialogue about the United States' Children's Television Act of 1990, contact the Center for Media Education's *Campaign for Kids' TV*, which can help you with effective strategies for organizing, potential allies in your community and the best children's shows to recommend to local stations. *Campaign for Kids' TV*, Center for Media Education, 1012 Heather Ave., Takoma Park, MD 20912; (301)270-3379.

3. Investigate and Promote Alternative Video Libraries.

Many public libraries have video libraries featuring quality programs, movies and entertainment for both adults and children. Some churches and synagogues also have developed alternative video collections. Oftentimes, smaller collections of videos are not used because community residents are not aware of their availability. Investigate what titles are available. Offer to work with the video librarian to form a publicity committee and try some of the following:

- Make short lists (1-page flyer) of different kinds of videos: "10 Videos for Kids" or "Movies You May have Missed." Circulate these lists to your own group and make a master copy available for other groups and organizations to duplicate and distribute.
- Write up a short "quality video of the week" review and ask your community newspaper to run it in a prominent place (perhaps next to the TV listings). Or ask churches and synagogues to put it in their weekly bulletins.

- Turn the reviews and lists into eye-catching "mini-posters" (using desktop publishing) and place them on bulletin boards in laundromats, grocery stores and other well-travelled locations.

4. Start a Media Bulletin Board.

If your group meets regularly in a school, church, community center or library, establish a Media Bulletin Board in your meeting room or a well-traveled hallway. Materials generated during the workshops can be displayed, as well as magazine and newspaper articles, announcements, cartoons, and other items of interest that participants find.

A Media Bulletin Board provides an on-going forum for your group to exchange ideas beyond the workshops. It can also generate interest in media literacy issues and raise awareness among people who have not been able to attend.

5. Promote Media Literacy Classes for Your Children.

- Share the results of this *Parenting in a TV Age* Workshop with teachers, principals and school librarians. Encourage them to integrate media literacy activities into appropriate subject areas (critical thinking, social studies, language arts). An excellent resource filled with media literacy ideas and exercises for grades four to six is *Media & You* by Donna Lloyd-Kolkin and Kathleen R. Tyner; Educational Technology Publications, 720 Palisade Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. $29.95.
- Find out whether your local high school subscribes to one of the free student TV newscasts (*Channel One, CNN Newsroom*). Encourage the superintendent and principal to work with classroom teachers to incorporate media literacy units in conjunction with the news broadcasts. Recommend these two organizations for media literacy resources for teachers:

Strategies for Media Literacy
1095 Market Street, Suite 410
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 621-2911

Center for Media and Values
1962 S. Shenandoah St.
Los Angeles, CA 90034
(310) 559-2944

- Recommend your church youth group, Sunday School or family camp consider two excellent study units that incorporate media literacy with Biblical values and faith development. Both include lesson plans, handout masters and age-appropriate activities about commercials, video games, the news, etc.

  Grades 1-6: *Who Touched the Remote Control?* by Mary Duckert $9.95
  Grades 7-12: *The Electronic Lifeline* by Linda Woods Peterson, $3.95

  Order from Friendship Press, Box 37844, Cincinnati, OH 45222-3784.

6. Publicize the Results of your Workshop Sessions.

Let other parents know what you're learning! Let other groups know about *Parenting in a TV Age* and how they can hold workshops for their members.

- Invite writers in your group to prepare summary articles of tips and ideas the group develops. Submit to your local community newspaper or send to community organizations for their newsletters. Prepare short items for church or synagogue bulletins.
- Radio talk shows often cover the subject of television. Call to share ideas you learned in the workshop. Articulate members of the group might be placed as guests. They could also appear at other community events, such as Rotary club breakfasts or senior citizen luncheons.
- Invite your local newspaper or television station to send a reporter to interview participants and do a story on the workshop program. Emphasize the positive nature of the workshop and specific actions that resulted.

And don't forget — send copies of your articles or news of your workshop to the Center for Media and Values. We're eager to know what you learned and who attended.

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND VALUES

Additional Resources

The Center for Media and Values has a wealth of resource materials on a variety of media topics. Back issues of *Media&Values* magazine contain reproducible "pull-out pages" (similar to the handouts used in this Kit) which you can use to create additional workshop sessions on the following topics:

- **"Tuning in to TV Sex / How to Use TV to Dialogue with your Child."** Background material and suggestions for how to use TV to teach sexual responsibility and caring can be found in Issue #46: *The Birds, the Bees and Broadcasting: What the Media Teach our Kids about Sex."* 1-4 copies: $4; 5-50 copies: $3.25 ea.

- **"How to Watch Television with your Grandchildren."** Included in Issue #45: *Coming of Age: Media and the Mature Audience*, this section also has an excellent one-page questionnaire for grandparents about television and media that's guaranteed to keep discussion lively and focused! 1-4 copies: $4; 5-50 copies $3.25 ea.

- **"Making the Media Work for You / Action Ideas for Family Awareness."** Create a general Media Awareness session using this 4-page handout featuring questions about family use of computers, tape decks, radio, TV, print and video. Copies of the handout are available in quantity: package of 25 (Order #R3525): $3.95. package of 100 (Order # R35100): $9.95.

The Center also has other Media Literacy Workshop Kits™ available:

- ***Break the Lies that Bind*** is a six-session workshop kit exploring how advertising and media teach us to be males and females, and influence our perceptions of beauty and body image. Especially good for teens and their parents. $21.95.

- ***Selling Addiction*** provides two sessions to uncover the myths behind cigarette and alcohol ads, and specifically how advertisers target children and teens, especially females and minorities. $34.95 / with video. (Available December, 1991.)

- ***News for the '90s*** contains three sessions on how to analyze the news and the power of images to shape our opinions and attitudes. $17.95.

Order all of the above from the Center for Media and Values, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034. Or call 213-559-2944 for Visa/MasterCard orders over $10. Annual membership in the Center ($30/personal; $75/organizational) entitles you to a 10% discount on all Center resources.

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PARENTING IN A TV AGE

A Media Literacy Workshop Kit™

on Children and Television

- The first complete ready-to-use group process on an issue of importance for everyone concerned about children today.
- Stimulating, involving and easy to use materials. Designed for four adaptable sessions of 90-120 minutes each.
- Ideal for parent-teacher groups, churches and synagogues, community programs, adult education. Grandparents, too!
- A positive, creative approach that can really make a difference.

WHY SHOULD YOU CONSIDER THIS WORKSHOP KIT?

Most parents worry about the potential effects of TV on their children. By the time children graduate from high school, they will have spent nearly three years in front of the TV set.

Should parents be concerned? How much influence do parents and teachers have? How did children become a consumer market? Can you manage TV viewing so both you and your children get the best it offers while minimizing its negative effects?

Parenting in a TV Age provides a step-by-step process using video and print resources to help parent groups learn to analyze the media and teach their kids. In four informative and lively sessions, you'll explore and identify:

Five basic things children should know about TV.
How commercials target and sell children.
How to set family standards for violence and other questionable content.
How to improve children's television for all children in *your* community.

WHAT'S IN THIS KIT?

1. Step-by-step leader's guides for each of four sessions, which can be explored individually or as a series. 90-120 minutes each.
2. 16-page booklet of handouts with license to reprint.
3. Special 36-page issue of *Children and Television: Growing Up in a Media World*, containing background articles and essays for leader preparation.
4. *From Awareness to Action: Media Literacy for the 90's*, an 8-page booklet on the basics of media literacy.

WHO PREPARED THIS WORKSHOP KIT?

The Center for Media and Values is a nonprofit membership organization pioneering a *new way of thinking* about TV and media and *new resources for analyzing* and actively critiquing the media's influence in our daily lives. Our goal is to create more knowledgeable, more selective, more media-wise readers, listeners and viewers.

Media Literacy Workshop Kits™ grew out of the widely-acclaimed *Media&Values* magazine. Other kits are also available and more are in development. We welcome your membership.

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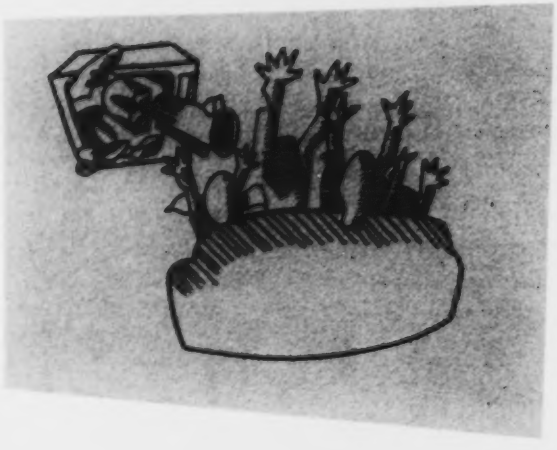
PARENTING IN A TV AGE

Handout Masters



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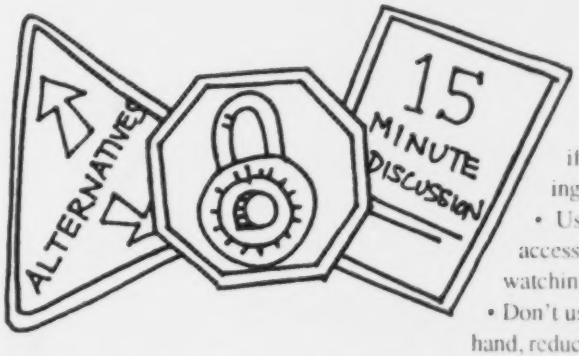
#1 STRATEGIES FOR PARENTING

Taking Charge: Strategies for Parenting in a TV Age

1. Set Limits.



The first thing to do to take charge of your children's TV-watching is to set limits on how much TV they will be allowed to watch. For example, a maximum of 2 hours a day, or no more than 10 hours a week. Other ideas:

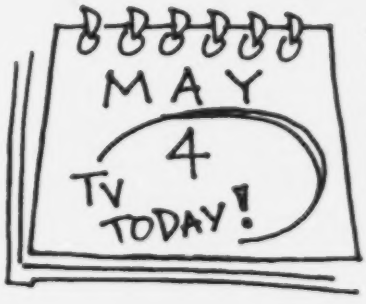
- Encourage a variety of daily TV alternatives for both you and them — sports, games, hobbies, reading, chores.
- Decide ahead of time what your criteria are for their selecting popular shows that may contain violence or content you find problematic. For example, "You can watch *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* if you spend 15 minutes discussing it with me afterwards."
- Use a locking device to prohibit access to certain channels or prevent watching at certain times.
- Don't use TV as a reward; on the other hand, reducing the limits you've set or prohibiting TV-watching for a time can be an effective discipline.
- Be willing to set limits on your own viewing as a model for your child.

2. Watch by the Show, not by the Clock.

Keep a copy of *TV Guide* or your local TV weekly around so that you and your children can use it to choose which shows to watch rather than turning on the TV and flipping channels until something catches your attention.

- This works best if you don't wait until you're ready to watch before checking the listings. Help your children decide what to watch well before they are ready to turn on the TV (like every Sunday afternoon, or before school each day).
- When the chosen show is over, turn the TV off. If you enforce your limits, your children will learn to prioritize and watch what they *really* like.

3. Plan Special Viewing Times to Watch with Your Child.



Take advantage of holiday specials or the many options that cable TV and video offer. Look for shows and videos that offer alternative perspectives or images that your children do not usually see on TV — non-violence winning out over violence, or individuals who refuse money or power.

- Start a family video collection with approved movies and tapes your child can enjoy when there's nothing else to watch. Compare notes with other parents about sources or suggested titles.
- Look ahead for programs that help in your child's education. Watch together, then find related books to enhance their knowledge.

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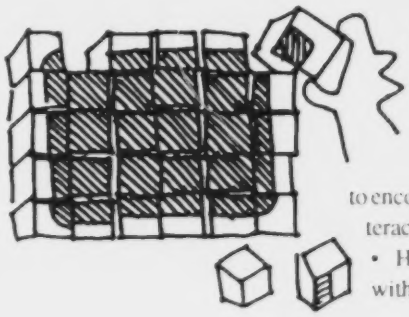
4. Talk Back to the TV.

What better way to let your children know of your opinions about what's on TV than by talking to it? Sometimes talking to the TV may drive them crazy, but they'll learn your perspective!

• Use storylines or characters on TV to dialogue later with your kids about topics that are sometime hard to discuss — emotional feelings, family relationships, appropriate sexual behavior, divorce or death, religious beliefs. Rather than question directly, it may be more effective to muse aloud; musing lets your children hear your values and prompts conversation in a non threatening way.

5. Try Some Structured Activities While You Watch.



Structured activities are more demanding ways — both for you and your children — to encourage positive interaction with TV.

• Help your children with geography by keeping an atlas or globe next to the TV. Encourage them to find the different places that are mentioned on the news.

• Watch a show with the sound turned off, adding your own sound effects and dialogue.

• Try to predict the kinds of commercials that will appear in a selected show. This helps kids connect program content with commercial intent.

• Even a show with "terrible" values can be a positive learning experience when used creatively.

6. Additional Resources

Your Children and TV: A Practical Guide for Making Television a Positive Influence in Children's Lives, by Ellen B. De Franco. Simple but creative ideas that don't require special materials or knowledge. Mar Co Products, Inc., P.O. Box 1052, Doylestown, PA 18901; (800)448-2197, $4.95 + $3.50 for postage & handling.

The TV Smart Book for Kids, by Peggy Charren and Carol Hulsizer. A calendar from Action for Children's Television with questions and activities designed for children and parents to use together. E.P. Dutton, 2 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016; (800)526-0275, $6.95.

Use TV to Your Child's Advantage, by Dorothy Singer, Jerome L. Singer and Diana M. Zuckerman. Encourages parents to use television programs to stimulate their children's learning and creativity — filled with parent/child activities. Acropolis Books LTD., 13950 Park Center Road, Herndon, VA 22071; (800)451-7771, $9.95 + $2.25 for postage and handling.

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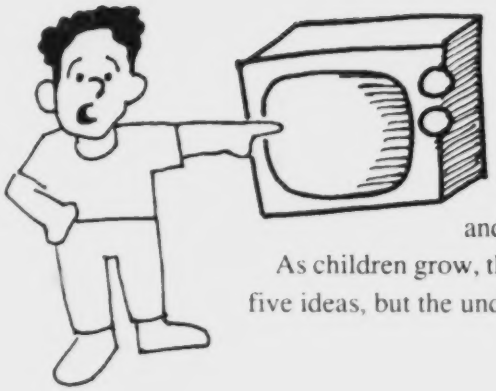
#2 FIVE IMPORTANT IDEAS

Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV

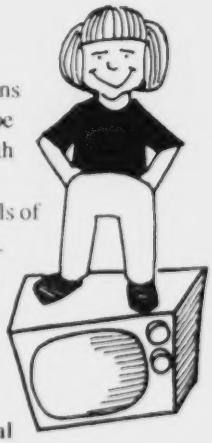


Everybody tells you to "watch TV with your kids." "Talk to your kids about what they see." But what do you look for? What do you say? Where do you start?

The following five points give you a foundation for helping your children become more aware of how television works and what role it plays in our own lives and in our modern world. This is called media literacy.

As children grow, they will be able to understand more and more about these five ideas, but the underlying principles are always the same.

1. We Help Create TV As We Watch It.

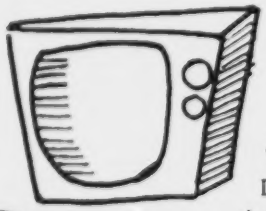


This fundamental principle turns the tables on the common assumption that TV just entertains us and all we do is watch it. Actually we are very active as we watch. Our bodies may not be moving but in our heads, we're trying to connect what we're seeing on the screen with everything else we know.

And each of us, whether adult or child, gets involved in TV programs with different levels of understanding because of who we are and what life experiences we bring to our TV viewing.

Thus we can filter and change what TV presents by *the way we watch it*. We can question, challenge and contradict — or support and reinforce — what we see and hear. It's especially important to talk back to TV (as well as cable and video) in front of children. If you don't say anything, they'll assume what they're seeing and hearing must be ok with you.

The other four ideas help us filter and change our media use by reminding us of several important ideas to remember *as we watch*



2. TV's World Is Made Up.

We all know that nothing on TV — whether cartoons or movies or commercials — is "real." But even adults still fall for the images and illusions that TV creates. Think, for example, how "perfect" everything looks on TV. Do flowers ever fade? Do clothes wrinkle? Does cereal get soggy? Maybe that's because in the TV studio, the "milk" is really white glue.

Media-makers are our modern-day storytellers. Even a news program is "constructed" by very talented photographers, writers and editors who select certain pictures and reject others. Like you, they are sometimes fair, sometimes tired, sometimes brilliant. And like every good storyteller, they have all kinds of ways to keep their audience interested and involved. How do they do this?

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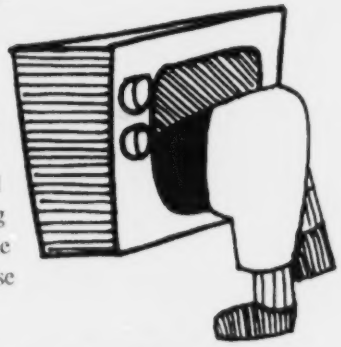
3. TV Makers Use Identifiable Techniques.



We can take apart the world that media makers construct by identifying the camera angles, music, special effects and symbols that make scary scenes more scary, tyrants more evil, or advertised products more alluring.

Without knowing it, children pick up on these techniques very early. Kids who make their own videos, for example, instinctively use close-ups or fade-outs to imitate TV. Yet they do not always realize how they are manipulated by the power of these techniques when they are watching TV. Counting laughtracks in a sitcom or the number of times the music changes in a favorite video are revealing ways to de-mystify TV, enhance appreciation of these techniques and help your child be less susceptible to manipulation.

Another way to identify how media construct a world that's not completely "real" is to ask certain questions of the media. The final two ideas suggest important questions we can ask:

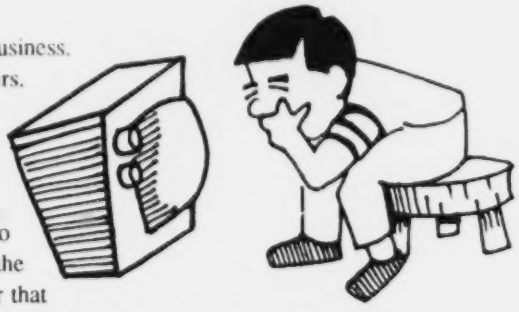
4. TV Teaches Us that Some People and Ideas Are More Important than Others.

All media carry subtle messages about who and what is important. Some people are typically cast as victims; others get to be heroes and heroines. Some characters are glamorized; others are treated with contempt. Some ideas always get headlines; others get left out completely.

Nothing we read or see in the media, even in the news, can ever be completely "objective." Sometimes, like us, media makers use stereotypes carelessly. We should expect them, however, to strive for fairness and *balance* between various ideas and viewpoints.

In the U.S., the First Amendment protects the freedom to express diverse points of view. At the same time, less popular or new ideas can have a hard time getting aired, especially if they challenge long-standing assumptions or commonly-accepted beliefs. To uncover these underlying viewpoints in the media, ask *"Who benefits?"* or *"Who loses?"* *Who benefits* from the way older persons are portrayed in this sitcom? *Who loses* when a news show only interviews white persons?" Answering this question helps us teach our children to think critically about what they see and hear. That's important for citizenship in a democratic society.

5. TV Is In Business to Make Money.



In the U.S. and increasingly around the world, media are big business. Producers sell programs to networks. Networks sell time to advertisers. Advertisers sell products to viewers. And the viewers are sold too! You've heard the phrase: "This program is brought to you by your sponsor." Not really. *You* are brought to the sponsor by the program.

It's important to teach our kids (and remind ourselves) that commercial television is not "free" entertainment. Its primary purpose is to sell viewers to advertisers. We "pay" for TV by increased prices on the things we buy. But advertising doesn't just invite us to buy this or that product, it teaches us *to buy*, period. And to feel dissatisfied unless we have the newest, the latest, the best.

A useful question to ask is *"Who's making money* from the news tonight? Or *who's making money* from this sporting event? The point is not that making money is wrong but that almost everything we see and hear on TV is subject to influence by a profit motive.

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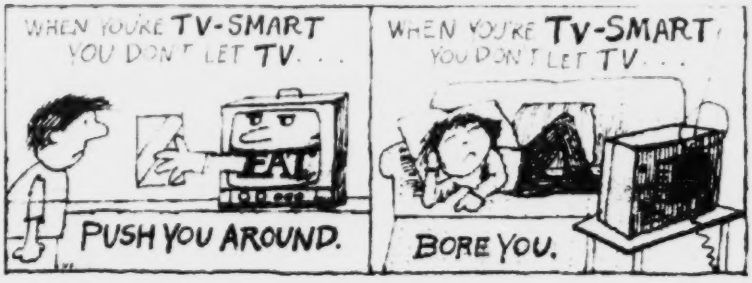
#3 TUBE TURN-ONS

How to Be a Smart TV Watcher:

A Special Page for Kids!

By Ellen B. De Franco



Do your parents bug you about the TV you watch? Do they question *how much* TV you watch? Here are some things you can try to become a smarter TV user. In fact, when you start doing these Turn-Ons, maybe you can teach your parents some things about TV!

Usually the more you know about something, the more you like it. Just think how confused you would be if you tried playing soccer or hopscotch without knowing the rules. The same thing is true of TV: the more you learn about it, the more fun it can be.

TV Turn-On #1: Put TV Under a Microscope

Examine as you watch. Use construction paper to make two-inch-square reaction cards to select during a program and then use as reminders afterwards to talk about what you have seen. Below are some suggested reaction messages. Add more of your own ideas:

Fun	*Exciting*
Adventuresome	*Too scary*
Nicer to males than females	*Clever*
Too many killings	*Silly*
Few people of different races	*Pleasant*
Only half-true	*Not fair*
Lots of put-downs	*Not funny*
	Can't be done

TV Turn-On #2: Be Your Own TV Doctor

This one's a lot like putting TV under a microscope, but instead you put yourself under a stethoscope by deciding how you feel as you watch TV. Make mood cards to use during and after each program. Stack these cards each day, and at the end of a week count the numbers in each category. Talk about your moods with your family. Use construction paper to make two-inch-square cards with moods on them like:

bored	*scared*	*laughing*	*inspired*	*grumpy*
happy	*sad*	*mad*	*annoyed*	*excited*

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TV Turn-On #3: Use TV as a People Encyclopedia

Watch programs for examples of the many different ways people have of doing things and getting along together. Talk about what you find out with your family and friends. Here are some categories to study:

Families	*Owning things*	*Schools*
Friendship	*Favorite people*	*Sex roles*
Groups	*Discipline*	*Fads*
Cooperation	*Responsibility*	*Different kinds of work*
Prejudice	*Commercials*	*Care of the environment*

TV Turn-On #4: Become a TV Commercial Detective — Spot the gimmicks!

Understand the BIG BUSINESS side of TV. Sponsors pay a lot of money to advertise their products before, during and after programs to make people want to buy them. Watch and look for some of the tricks used to help sell products. Copy the following list onto a piece of paper and put check marks next to these tricks when you see them:

Things look bigger, better or tastier than they really are.
Backgrounds or settings are usually beautiful or glamorous.
Music and sound effects add to the attraction of products.
Scenes are very romantic or funny.
When prices of products are mentioned, they do not always include necessary additional costs, such as batteries.
The name or logo of a product is repeated over and over so people will be sure to remember it.
Things appear to be able to do more than they really can.
The real things often aren't as good as they appear in commercials.

TV Turn-On #5: Be picky and choosy about the TV you watch

Once you've started to do some of the other TV Turn-Ons, you'll want to start thinking about which shows you really like, and which shows you really don't like. Think carefully about the programs you watch. Give them your honest rating.

C = can't be missed S = so-so W = waste of time

Stop watching "W" and "S" rated programs. Find something else to do instead. Make a chart to keep track of your ratings.

Ellen B. De Franco is a free-lance columnist and author of the book Your Children and TV.
Art adapted with permission from The TV Smart Book for Kids *by Peggy Charren and Carol Hulsizer, illustrated by Marilyn Hafner (1986). E.P. Dutton, 2 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016; (800)526-0275, $6.95.*

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#4 FAMILY VIEWING DIARY

TV in:

- ❑ Bedroom
- ❑ Kitchen
- ❑ Living Room
- ❑ Den
- ❑ Other: _____

Day / Date	Shows Watched	Time: Start / Finish	Who Watched

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#5 COMMON ADVERTISING STRATEGIES

1. Ideal Kids. The kids in commercials are often *a little older* and a little more perfect than the target audience of the ad — they are, in other words, role models for what the advertiser wants children in the target audience to *think they want to be like*. A commercial that is targeting eight year-olds, for instance, will show 11 or 12 year-old models playing with an eight year-old's toy.

2. Heart Strings. Commercials often create an emotional ambience that draws you into the advertisement and makes you feel good. The McDonald's commercials featuring father and daughter eating out together, or the AT&T *Reach Out and Touch Someone* ads are good examples. We are more attracted by products that make us feel good.

3. Amazing Toys. Many toy commercials show their toys in life-like fashion, doing incredible things. Airplanes do loop-the-loops and cars do wheelies, dolls cry and spring-loaded missiles hit gorillas dead in the chest. This would be fine if the toys really did these things.

4. Life-like Settings. *Barbie* struts her stuff on the beach with waves crashing in the background, space aliens fly through dark outer space and all-terrain vehicles leap over rivers and trenches. The rocks, dirt, sand and water don't come with the toys, however.

5. Sounds Good! Music and other sound effects add to the excitement of commercials. Sound can make toys seem more life-like or less life-like, as in a music video. Either way, they help set the mood advertisers want.

6. Cute Celebrities. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* sell pizza. *Spuds McKenzie* sells beer. "Joe Cool" camel sells cigarettes. All of these are ways of helping children identify with products either now or for the future.

7. Selective Editing. Selective editing is used in all commercials, but especially in commercials for athletic toys like frisbees or footballs. Commercials show only brilliant catches and perfect throws. Unfortunately, that's not the way most children experience these toys.

8. Family Fun. "This is something the whole family can do together!" or "This is something Mom will be glad to buy for you." Many commercials show parents enjoying their children's fun as if the toy will bring more family togetherness.

9. Excitement! Watch the expressions on children's faces. Never a dull moment, never boring. "This toy is the most fun since fried bananas!" they seem to say. How can your child help thinking the toy's great?

10. Star Power. Sports heroes, movie stars, and teenage heart throbs tell our children what to eat and what to wear. Children listen, not realizing that the star is paid handsomely for the endorsement.

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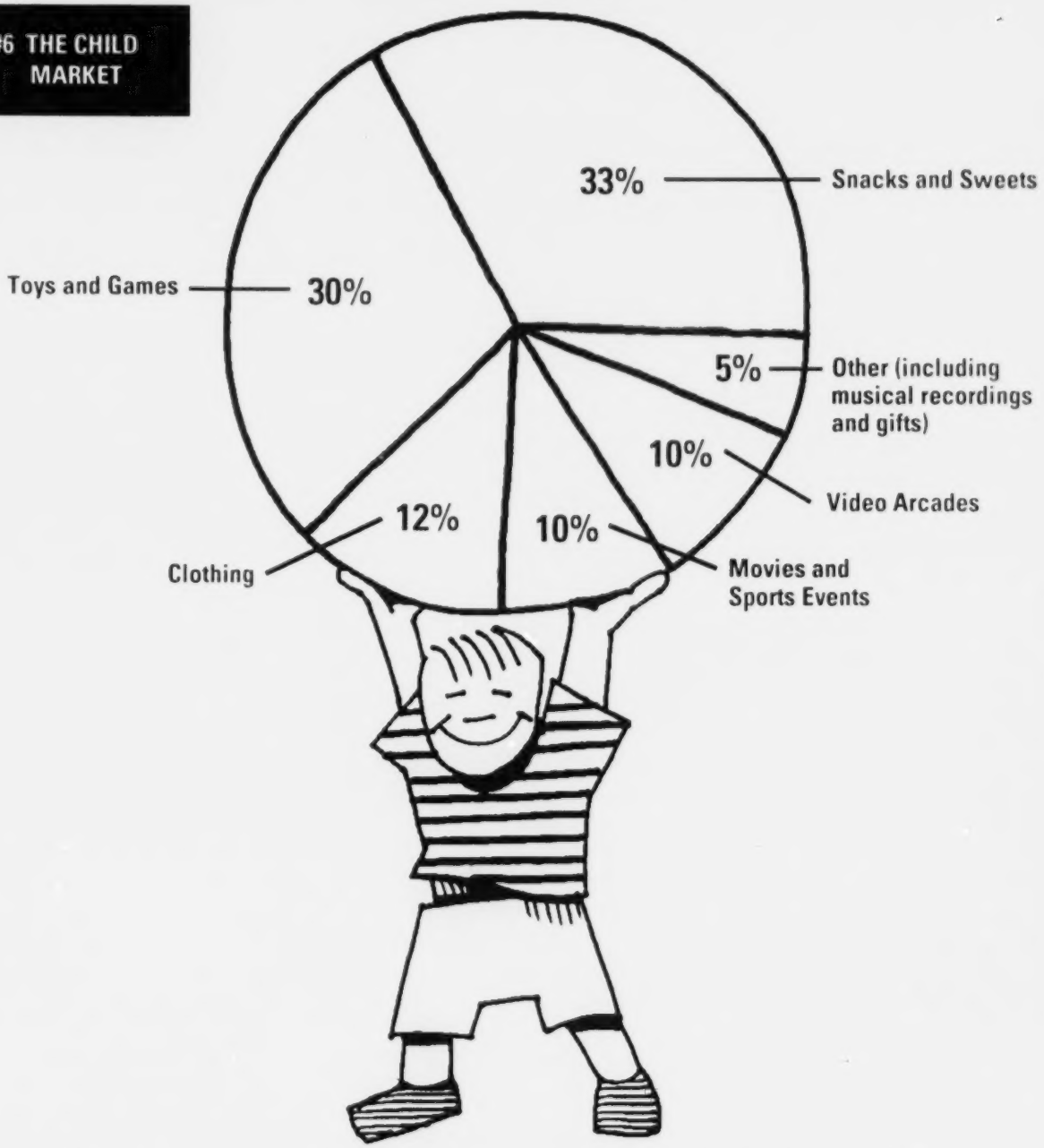
#6 THE CHILD MARKET



Children potentially constitute business' most lucrative market because they are actually three markets in one:

- A *current* market that spends over $6 billion per year.
- A *future* market for goods and services.
- A market of *influentials* who cause many billions of dollars of purchases by their parents.

Data courtesy of James McNeal, Professor of Marketing, Texas A&M University. Statistics gathered in 1989 among children aged 4-12.

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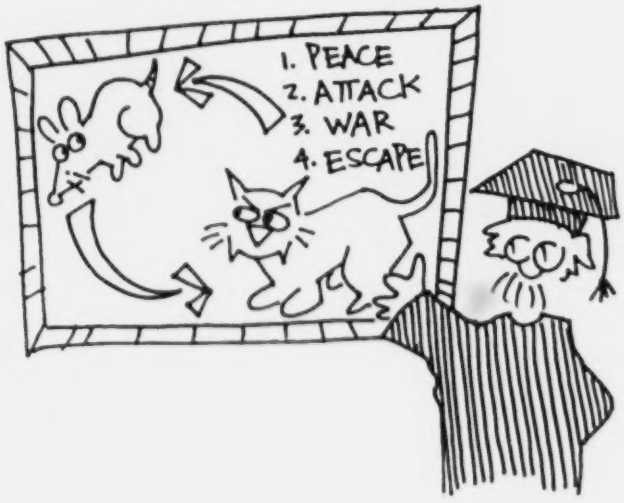
#7 CHILDREN'S CARTOON PLOT



On the surface, children's cartoon characters look and act different from one another. Some are animals; some are human beings; others are machines. On closer examination of the structure, the themes, and the stories, however, the characteristics and underlying motives of specific protagonists reveal the common plots of the shows. They generally follow four steps:

1. THE BEGINNING: Peace

At the start of each episode, the heroes tend to be engaged in a peaceful activity, suggesting that they have only good intentions.

2. PROVOCATION: Enemy Attack

A surprise attack of the enemy disrupts peace. The attack occurs for no reason other than the enemy's greed, power hunger and malice. To restore peace the heroes have to defend themselves against the enemies. Their self-defense seems justified. They do not have to assume any responsibility for the "first strike" nor for the further unfolding of the conflict.

3. CENTRAL ACTION: The Hero's Self-Defense/War

The central action of each cartoon focuses on a fight or war between heroes and enemies. The enemies threaten to conquer the country, even the universe. The heroes defend freedom and assert their moral convictions against mind control, authoritarianism, and evil. The hero survives the assaults of deadly weapons and, of course, always wins!

4. LAST MINUTE RESCUE: The Enemy's Escape

After a long battle in which the enemy almost succeeds in gaining world domination, one of the heroes tends to come to the last minute rescue of his or her allies. The enemy has to surrender to the hero's show of force, but always manages to escape before the hero can defeat the enemy completely.

Implications of the Enemy's Escape

The enemy's escape implies that his or her defeat is only temporary. While contained for the time being, the enemy will certainly attack again in the near future, prompting another disturbance of the hero's peace and a war with uncertain outcome. Peace will continue to be precarious. Therefore, the hero must be prepared for the next armed exchange with the enemy.

Reprinted with permission from the leader's guide to *The World is a Dangerous Place: Images of the Enemy on Children's Television*. Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Age, 1493 Cambridge St., Cambridge, MA 02139; (617)497-1553, $40 includes shipping and handling.

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#8 CHILDREN'S TELEVISION ACT OF 1990

Children's Television Act of 1990

The following are the two major provisions of the Act:

1 Each commercial television broadcast licensee shall limit the duration of advertising in children's television programming to not more than 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends and not more than 12 minutes per hour on weekdays.*

2 The [Federal Communications] Commission shall, in its review of any application for renewal of a television broadcast license, consider the extent to which the licensee —

(1) has complied with such standards [above]; and

(2) has served the educational and informational needs of children through the licensee's overall programming, including programming specifically designed to serve such needs.

In addition to consideration of the licensee's programming as required, the Commission may consider —

(1) any special nonbroadcast efforts by the licensee which enhance the educational and informational value of such programming to children; and

(2) any special effort by the licensee to produce or support programming broadcast by another station in the licensee's marketplace which is specifically designed to serve the educational and informational needs of children.

* The law also states that:
After January 1, 1993, the Commission —

(1) may review and evaluate the advertising duration limitations required; and

(2) may, after notice and public comment and a demonstration of the need for modification of such limitations, modify such limitations in accordance with the public interest.

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#9 EVALUATE CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Questions and Guidelines

To Evaluate TV Programs for Children

Use the following checklist to evaluate television programs and videos for your child. Or use it to work with your local television station(s) to select appropriate programming to meet requirements for the Children's Television Act of 1990.

Yes	No	
❑	❑	1. Does the program present conflict that a child can understand, and does it demonstrate positive techniques for resolving the conflict?
❑	❑	2. Does the program present racial groups positively and does it show them in situations that enhance a child's self image? • Who has the lead role? • Who is the villain? • Are supporting roles stereotypes?
❑	❑	3. Does the program present sex roles and adult roles positively? • Are the men either super-heroes or incompetents? • Are the women flighty or disposed to deception? • Are teens portrayed with adult characteristics? • Is the story told from a male or female point of view?
❑	❑	4. Does the program appeal to the audience for whom it is intended? (A program for 12-year olds should be different from a program for six-year-olds.)
❑	❑	5. Does the program present social issues that are appropriate for the child-viewer and something a child can act on at a child's level. (Pet care versus saving endangered species; recycling cans vs. global warming.)
❑	❑	6. Does the program encourage worthwhile ideals, values and beliefs?
❑	❑	7. Does the program present humor at a child's level? (Or is it adult sarcasm, ridicule or an adult remembering what was funny from childhood?)
❑	❑	8. Does the program stimulate constructive activities and enhance the quality of a child's play?
❑	❑	9. Does the program's pace allow the child to absorb and contemplate the material presented?
❑	❑	10. Does the program have artistic qualities?
❑	❑	11. Does the program separate fact from fantasy?
❑	❑	12. Does the program separate advertisements from program content?

—Guidelines developed by San Francisco's Committee on Children's Television, Inc.

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#10 SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

Evaluation

In order to make future media education sessions more effective and responsive to your needs, please take a few minutes to fill out the following evaluation thoughtfully and with candor.

Beside each statement below, write the number that best reflects your evaluation of the session (5 is best, 1 is worst). For each item you rate 3, 2, or 1, please write a two or three word explanation next to the statement.

Strongly Disagree (worst) 1 ← 2 — 3 — 4 → 5 **Strongly Agree (best)**

____ 1. From the beginning of today's session, I understood the purpose of the session.

____ 2. The structure and flow of today's session was logical and well-designed.

____ 3. Each activity was relevant to the topic.

____ 4. I gained useful knowledge that I can use immediately.

____ 5. I will watch, read, or listen to media differently because of today's session.

____ 6. The leader facilitated group interaction in a way that enhanced the group's learning.

____ 7. The leader thought my input was important.

____ 8. It was easy to interrupt and ask questions without disrupting the flow of the session.

____ 9. When the leader suggested discussion questions, I wanted to share my ideas.

____10. There was a balance of instruction and group sharing.

____11. Handouts were adequate and helpful.

____12. The leader adjusted/adapted the session to match the make-up of the group.

____13. My expectations for the session were met.

What is your overall opinion of today's session? (circle one)

Excellent Good Fair Mediocre Poor

Please answer the following questions briefly:

What was your favorite part of today's session?

What are you aware of now that you were not aware of before today's session?

What action do you see yourself taking as a result of today's session?

What could have been included that would have made today's session more relevant to you?

What did other participants think of today's session?

Additional comments:

This evaluation let me express my feelings about the session effectively (circle one):

Yes No (please explain why)

Circle other topics that you'd like to see dealt with similarly in future sessions with your group:

Sexism in the media
How to watch the news
Media and children
Write in your own:

Racism in the media
Media and the environment
Media and addiction

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Handout Masters for

Parenting in a TV Age

A Media Literacy Workshop Kit™

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To accompany Session 1:

#1: *Taking Charge: Strategies for Parenting in a TV Age*
#2: *Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV*
#3: *Tube Turn-Ons*
#4: *Family Viewing Diary*

To accompany Session 2:

#5: *Ten Common Advertising Strategies Targeted to Children*
#6: *The Child Market*

To Accompany Session 3:

#7: *The Children's Cartoon Plot*

To Accompany Session 4:

#8: *Children's Television Act of 1990*
#9: *Questions and Guidelines to Evaluate TV Programs for Children*

Supplementary Resources:

#10: *Evaluation Form*

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Media&Values

A Quarterly Resource for Media Awareness

Fall 1990/Winter 1991 Number 52-53

CHILDREN AND TELEVISION:

Growing Up In a Media World

5 Ideas to Teach Your Kids About TV *p. 16*

How children Became a Consumer Market *p. 4*

Nintendo Crescendo *p. 21*

Creating Cartoons *p. 12*

Special Double Issue!

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Media&Values

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Media&Values is published quarterly by the Center for Media and Values, an educational not-for-profit membership organization which empowers the public by providing resources for critical awareness about media. The Center believes that a concern for values in today's media age is not so much knowing all the answers as asking the right questions.

In addition to publishing *Media&Values*, the Center creates educational curriculum materials for local use, organizes forums and conferences, and maintains an information and resource center on the media issues of our time. Funding for the Center comes from subscriptions and memberships along with individual donations, foundation grants and organizational co-sponsorships.

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Editorial Business Office
1962 South Shenandoah Street, Los Angeles, CA 90034 (213)559-2944

In Canada
85 St. Clair Avenue E, Room 500, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8

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Executive Director
Elizabeth Thoman, CHM

Editor
Rosalind Silver

Managing Editor
Kerry Gerot

Educational Coordinator
Jay Davis

Resources
Beth White

Administration and Business
Zahava Gerstenfeld

Promotion
Stacey Suyat

Circulation
Sabina Howell
Chad Humpal

Typography/Production
Abington Graphics, Los Angeles

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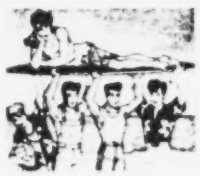

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Cover Photo by Jerry Burns, a free-lance photographer in Atlanta. ©1990 Media&Values

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ALTERED STATES

How Television Changes Childhood and Challenges Parents

An interview with Joshua Meyrowitz by Barbara Osborn

In your award-winning book No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior, *you deal with television's role in blurring traditional distinctions between public and private spheres. In particular, you say that TV and other electronic media have connected the home to the outside world. What impact has this had on the family?*

The family sphere used to be defined by its isolation from the public realm. There was the public male realm of "rational accomplishment" and brutal competition, and the private female and child-rearing sphere of home, intuition and emotion. The private realm was supposed to be isolated from the nasty realities of adult life. For both better and worse, television and other electronic media tend to break down the difference between those two worlds. The membrane around the family sphere is much more permeable. Children are now exposed to many aspects of adult male life, and even homebound women are no longer fully isolated from the public realm. TV takes public events and transforms them into dramas that are played out in the privacy of our living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms.

Parents used to be the channel through which children learned about the outside world. They could decide what to tell their children and when to tell it to them. Since children learn to read in stages, books provide a kind of natural screening process, where adults can decide what to tell and not tell children of different reading abilities. Television destroyed the system that segregated adult from child knowledge and separated information into year-by-year slices for children of different ages. Instead, it presents the same information directly to children of all ages, without going through adult filters. TV takes our kids across the globe before parents give them permission to cross the street. Children don't necessarily understand everything that they see on television, but

they are exposed to many aspects of the adult world that parents might not have decided to tell them about.

So television presents a real challenge to adults. While a parent can read a newspaper without sharing it with children in the same room, television is accessible to everyone in that space. And unlike books, television doesn't allow us to flip through it and see what's coming up. We may think we're giving our children a lesson in science by having them watch the Challenger take off, and then suddenly they learn about death, disaster and adult mistakes. We have no way to protect them from that.

Books allow adults to discuss privately what to tell or not tell children. This also allows parents to keep adult material secret from children and keep their secret keeping secret. Take that same material and put it on *The Today Show* and you have 800,000 children hearing the very things the adults are trying to keep from them. More importantly, kids learn the "secret of secrecy," that adults conspire over what to tell or not tell children. They learn that adults are worried and anxious about being parents.

How has this altered parental authority?

I think adults feel somewhat exposed now and no longer pretend to know everything in front of their children. This is not to say that adults have absolutely lost their authority. Kids look up to adults and want them to know a lot of answers. But through television, kids come to realize that adults do have many, many problems: adults fight, adults kill each other, adults cry, adults lose control, and so on. And adults now know that kids know these things about them.

Television supports the desire for adult authority but also makes children aware that it's not always there and that kids may even have to help parents gain authority over them. This paradoxical appoach to adult authority is seen most dramatically in the public service messages where kids are shown urging an alcoholic parent to become more responsible. TV empowers children to empower their parents.

This doesn't mean that adults should abdicate their authority over children. Adults are more experienced and knowledgeable. Adults should try to control and discuss what their kids watch. They should also try and maintain authority in their relationships with children in face-to-face interaction. But the old support system for unquestioned adult authority has been undermined significantly by television.

What's the psychic price of this blurring of adult and child spheres?

That's a complex question. I can give you a partial, historical answer. Up until the last 400 years in Western culture, there was no such thing as childhood as we have come to think of it. Even as late as the Middle Ages, children dressed like adults, drank in taverns, gambled, went to war, and those few who attended schools often went armed. The modern notions of childhood and adulthood only developed with the spread of literacy.

We must realize, however, that while TV encourages a kind of blurring of roles, it doesn't provide the social mechanisms for allowing change to happen. In fact, the initial short-term outcome isn't more harmony or equality; if anything, it's more tension and frustration. TV makes us aware of all the places we can't go, all the people we can't be, all the things we can't possess. TV makes us so aware of the larger world that many of us — especially women, children and minorities — begin to feel unfairly isolated in some corner of it.

By encouraging behaviors not yet supported by societal institutions, television places families under a lot of stress. Children now know more about the adult world, and most mothers have entered what was once the male workplace. Yet some schools continue to follow lesson plans that assume children's degree of awareness of the world still correlates only with age and reading ability. And many businesses continue to function as if each employee — whether male or female — has a wife at home cooking, cleaning and watching the kids. There have to be adjustments in the expectations of what goes on in schools, offices and at home. For example, there must be more flexible work schedules and more integration of family life and children in the business world.

Barbara Osborn is a Los Angeles-based journalist who leads media literacy workshops. A longer version of this interview first appeared in the catalogue of the exhibition From Receiver to Remote Control: The TV Set, *September 14–November 25, 1990, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY.*

Illustration by Tom Herzberg.

"Electronic media affect not only today's children; they also reshape future generations of childhood."

Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*

No Sense of Place (1985) *is available from Oxford University Press, 200 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016; (800) 451-7556, $9.95.*

Deciphering the News: A Parent's Choice

News and melodrama interlock. I noticed that Emily displayed a gory, sensationalist glee when she talked of, repeatedly, the story of a girl who was kidnapped and murdered, her throat cut and her body found in a sack. She heard it from a friend. Then it was on the *news*. Once reassured by me that she was not in danger, she enjoyed playing with the fear, exploring its parameters. I want her to be aware of dangers, to act–if necessary–on her own initiative; not to go with a stranger in the street, etc.

But it is also very important to me that she does not grow up to be fearful. She has heard the word "rape" on television news, but she does not know what it means. I have, sometimes, turned the television off, discreetly–in fact, censored the news. I am nervous of alarmism. Not paradoxically. Part of the *zeitgeist* of the 1980s is fear. And, surely, alarmism leads to self-victimization? There is this shifting borderline which I, as a parent, have to negotiate. When to protect? When not to protect? It is also my responsibility that she is not endangered.

Reprinted from "Mama Don't Preach" in Parents Talking Television *(1987), Comedia Publishing Group.*

FROM SAVERS TO SPENDERS:
How Children Became a Consumer Market

By James U. McNeal

There was a time — in fact, only 30 or 40 years ago — when children were not spoken of as spenders or customers but as savers and future consumers. Sure, they bought penny candy and an occasional soft drink, but retailers did not think of them as customers per se. They were more often perceived as "Mrs. Bohuslov's kids" who just happened to buy something while they were in the store. Children had money, but it was for saving, not spending. They were always saving up for something, according to them, but they never actually seemed to buy very much. They would, for example, save up for a football or bicycle, or even a college education, but usually these items and almost anything else they saved up for were bought by their parents or perhaps their grandparents.

Children received allowances then perhaps as frequently as they do today. Their allowances were relatively smaller, however, and parents usually dictated the amount or percent that could be spent — and this also was often small. Parents would justify this strict guidance with such sayings as, "a penny saved is a penny earned," and "save for a rainy day."

The youngest population segment that was of concern to retailers was the teens. Accounting for teens' expenditures by marketers did not begin to take place seriously until the late 1950s. In general, teens were viewed as tomorrow's consumers, whereas younger children were characterized only as future consumers.

All that changed with a phenomenon that we still talk about and write about, the baby boom. When World War II ended, families started having babies as if they were making up for all the lost war years. By 1950 the under-five population was 16,163,000 — an unheard of 60 percent increase in 10 years! As these baby boomers reached ages five to 12, their small amount of spending became very noticeable because of their substantially increased numbers. Moreover, these were prosperous years, and the amount that each child spent also increased; we do not know by how much because no one kept track. It was not considered important.

Three Markets in One

But, today, children are viewed as a viable market by many manufacturers and retailers. Saturday morning television, with its $100 million of child-focused advertising, is a moving monument to this new market.

Potentially, children constitute the most lucrative market there is for many businesses because the youngsters are actually three markets in one:

- They are a *current market* that spends $4.2 billion a year of their own money

on their own desires. In this sense children are viewed as having needs, having money to spend on items that satisfy their needs, and having a willingness to spend money. Entire industries — such as producers of candy, gum, frozen desserts, soft drinks, toys, comic books, records and cassettes — treat children as a current market. At the retail level, such outlets as video game parlors, movie houses and convenience stores also treat children as a ready market.

• Children are a *future market* for most goods and services. Manufacturers and retailers respond to them as future consumers to be cultivated now. Thus, department stores have special promotions for children — a sci-fi Saturday, for example — to build store awareness for the day when they begin to buy their own clothes.

• Children also constitute a market of *influencers* who cause many billions of dollars of purchases among their parents. Probably best known of these marketers are cereal firms that intensively advertise to children on Saturday morning television and directly or indirectly encourage the children to persuade their parents to buy certain brands of cereal. In the spring of 1986, General Mills introduced a new presweetened cereal to children. Julie Franz wrote in *Advertising Age*, "General Mills promised grocery store buyers that 95 percent of all children ages two through 11 will see the Circus Fun TV spot an average of 107 times during the cereal's first year."

Parents Prepare Children

Today's typical young consumers have several sources of funds, can spend their money on objects of their choice and are encouraged by their parents to become economically responsible as soon as possible. Most parents regard the notion of their children as consumers as a natural role to be assumed. The idea of parent-blessed mini-consumers appears to be a post-World War II phenomenon.

Theoretically, children do not require money because the products and services that they may purchase are ordinarily provided by parents. Then how is it that by age six or seven children have money to spend and are spending it? Several social forces produce this activity, but ultimately the parents determine it through their desire to *please* their children and their desire to *prepare* their children. We usually pamper our children from day one by giving to them an unending range of things obtained from the marketplace. As soon as they develop some money awareness, probably around age four or five, we begin giving them money in a desire to please them more, so that they may independently obtain some of the things we have been giving them.

Parents strongly desire to prepare their children for adulthood or at least for self-sufficiency. This may be a carryover from our 19th Century agrarian society, but in any case this desire takes the form of providing skills to the youngsters so that they may cope without the assistance of parents. Being a consumer is one of these skills.

It seems clear, then, that children are turned into consumers at a very early age in our society through the desires and encouragement of parents, who also provide the youngsters with the necessary financial support. The net result of this is that the children become a relatively big market segment for such items as sweets, snacks, soft drinks and toys as they pursue self-gratification and self-sufficiency. But, should children really be referred to as a market? According to the best-selling principles of marketing textbooks, the following four requirements must be met in order for a group to be considered a market:

• The people must *need* the product. That is, if children are referred to as a market for candy, for example, there must be a definable need for this product by this group.

• Individuals in the group must have the *authority* to buy the specific product. This requirement addresses the concept of the child being permitted by social custom or by those in charge to buy things.

• The people in the group must have the *ability* to purchase the products. This, of course, refers to the child having money and having control of it.

• The people in the aggregate must be *willing* to use their buying power. This means that having money is not enough; there must be a willingness to part with it.

As we look closely at each of these requirements, children appear to be a bona fide market. It is true that one might question the first requirement, need for the product, in terms of bubble gum or candy. It is also true that a child doesn't need this product to sustain life, however, needs are not only for *being* but also for *becoming*, socially and personally.

In the case of children, it might be appropriate to add a fifth requirement, that individuals in the group must have knowledge and understanding of the marketplace. It is one thing to have money and the willingness to spend it; it is quite another to understand how, where and when to spend it and what to spend it on.

There are no indications that the nation's parents are going to do anything to reduce the consumption efforts of their children. In fact, parents in general seem more determined than ever that their children will become consumers at an early age or, more fundamentally, become adult at an earlier age. Kids are marching toward adulthood at a much brisker pace than they used to and are wanting more mature things to go with this accelerated growth.

Casting children as consumers is not done without recognizing that there are many ethical, economic and social questions concerning this position. If children are in fact a market for various goods and services, does this mean we should consider

"We believe children make brand decisions very early that they will carry into their adult lives."

Ann Moore, publisher, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*

Keeping Track of Zillions

Have any doubts about kids' arrival as a consumptive market? Then take a look at *Zillions*, the new consumer reporting magazine for the schoolage set. Published by the Consumers Union, the slick, colorful bimonthly helps close the gap between children's spending power and their often all-too-limited knowledge of the pitfalls and lures facing any consumer.

Games, cartoons, colorful illustrations and childs-eye-view articles raise kids' consumer savvy by hammering home the points — beware being sold products you don't want and be wary of unjustified claims by advertisers and merchants.

For a subscription write to *Zillions*, P.O. Box 54861, Boulder, CO 80322-4861, $13.95/year other countries add $4.

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them as adults to a greater extent than we do? Alternately, from the standpoint of the consumer role, are children miniconsumers? Should we use a child model or an adult model to explain their consumer behavior? And, what about children's ability to understand fully the advertising messages and their intent? More specifically, some questions that parents might keep in mind when considering their children as little customers are as follows:

• Are parents aware that giving their children money to spend gives the children market power? While the money that one child receives is insignificant, the combined amount for all children causes children to have buying power and to be recognized as a market.

• Do parents really need to give their children money, particularly during preschool years? The parents meet the children's needs already and do it better than the children can.

• Are parents cognizant of retailers' feelings about children being given money to spend and being encouraged to spend it? Regardless of what motives the parents have for giving their children money, by virtue of giving it to them they set in motion certain activities at the retail level, such as stocking and displaying goods. Yet parents may not know the viewpoint of retailers.

• Are parents giving their children money, encouraging them to spend it, but relying principally on schools to teach the children appropriate consumer behavior? There is not much evidence that parents deliberately teach their children consumer behavior, yet they encourage them to be consumers.

• If parents insist on their children being consumers by giving them money and encouraging them to spend it, are they also giving approval to marketers to court their children as potential customers? We hear a lot of condemnation of marketers, particularly advertisers, for pursuing children as consumers, but from a business standpoint, it would be more surprising if they did not.

Although children as consumers have become a normal part of our socio-economic fabric, parents are creating many problems for themselves, for their children and for marketers by giving their children money and the encouragement to spend it. It certainly places a heavy responsibility on all three parties. There are no formal ground rules for children as consumers except the rules that apply to adults. Therefore, parents must be concerned with teaching their children consumer knowledge and skills, while marketers must be concerned with interacting properly with children in what is mainly an adult setting.

Many parents, on the other hand, seem to view children's consumer wants as being practically nonexistent if it were not for ads. Advertising, according to many parents, teaches children materialism, which is to want things for the sake of having them, not because they satisfy a variety of needs. Consumer protectionists, who are usually parents themselves, also tend to fault marketing for creating wants among children. While they speak of materialism, they more often protest about children wanting things they don't need as a result of perceived heavy-handed efforts by marketers, mainly through advertising.

Being a consumer in our nation is a right. Being a marketer is a privilege. It is the marketer that must be licensed, not the consumer. Children have a right to be consumers in spite of some inadequacies — their limited abilities, their limited knowledge, and their clumsiness. If business chooses children as a target market, whether current, future or influential, it assumes the responsibility in general for acknowledging their inabilities.

The plain fact of the matter is that something needs to be done to improve the marketing-child consumer connection. A strong relationship is a good thing for marketers — it means sales and profits now, and even greater sales and profits in the future. It is a good thing for children — it provides enormous input to their consumer socialization process as well as current satisfaction from products and their purchase of them. But no one should forget that children, particularly those under eight, are vulnerable to commercial abuses. Marketers have been shown to be abusive to children far too many times for their good will to be assumed.

"While many parents can summon up childhood memories of Keds, decoder rings and Mouseketeer ears, nowadays increasingly sophisticated merchandise is being pitched at much younger children, with far more advertising."

U.S. News & World Report

Posting Preteen Profits

Most of their money still comes from Mommy and Daddy. But the littlest consumers — 12 and down to barely out of diapers — are making cash registers ring and causing dollar signs to light up in advertisers' eyes. According to a recent article in *U.S. News & World Report*, producers of all kinds of products are jumping on the bandwagon. Did you know:

• Some 37 million children ages four to 12 control nearly $9 billion of their own money;

• A Minneapolis radio station runs car ads directed to kids as local dealers seek to tap their influence on parents;

• Fun 'n Fresh, a solid deodorant for kids as young as seven (spice scent for boys, rose petal for girls) is only one of a fast-growing supply of personal hygiene products, including Petite Naté (for after showers) and Bart Simpson hair gel;

• Children microwaving their own dinners can choose among dinosaur-shaped pasta, Banquet's Kid Cuisine, Looney Tunes Meals or My Own Meal line, then top the meal off with bubblegum yogurt;

• A colorful miniature vacuum cleaner for kids "to clean up your own mess" has joined youth-oriented Walkmans and recorders in the appliance store.

James U. McNeal is professor of marketing at Texas A&M University, where he specializes in teaching consumer behavior, and has been a consultant in the area of consumer education to both state and national governments. *Reprinted with permission from* Children as Consumers: Insights and Implications *(1987), D.C. Heath and Company, 125 Spring St., Lexington, MA 02173. $29.95.*

Illustrator Steven Nguyen is an art student at California State University, Los Angeles.

SNEAKERS THAT KILL:

Kids and Conspicuous Consumption

By Ronald K. L. Collins

In Baltimore, tennis shoes have become the motive for murder. Kids kill kids for sneakers. But why? The answer has much to do with our advertising culture, a culture too much driven by the captains of consumption. Incredibly, we are doing little to check this vast power.

Kids know the brand names. In their consumer-conscious world, status means all, having all. Nothing can be out of reach, not leather or silk, and certainly not expensive name-brand sneakers. Parents pay the price. Tragically, sometimes their children do, too, as when a 15-year-old Baltimore boy surrendered his life to someone who just had to stand in his $100 tennis shoes.

The formula for kiddy consumptive consciousness is simple: endless and seductive appeals to buy more. The advertisers' catechism teaches vulnerable children to worship materialism. The product push in turn begins a chain reaction of peer pressure, which then is eased only by purchasing the product. Everything from the cartoons kids watch to the comics they read, from school studies to sports activities, from movies to malls, is colored by the consumptive bias of commercialism.

Comic books are becoming product placement havens for toy manufacturers. These ads are woven into the comic plot, packed with visual and scripted references to name-brand toys. Even board games have been devised to accent product names.

Movies, too, are designed to feed young people's consumptive urge with placement ads for candy, cola, beer and toys cleverly crammed into cinematic programming.

Likewise, the manufacturers of harmful products, such as tobacco and alcohol, have perfected the consumptive thrust of their appeals to teenagers. Rock concerts and music video shows, sports events and beach parties are the stuff of which advertisers' dreams are made.

In all, today's advertising culture teaches our children to revel in conspicuous consumption; to adore purchasing power; and to value the "more" lifestyle above all else. Meanwhile, the once-valued American ethic of freedom born of moderation is vanishing. We have allowed materialism to become the measure of our childrens' lives.

The counter-commercial idea here is moderation over material manipulation. As David Shi, author of *The Simple Life*, so well puts it, this ideal "requires neither a log cabin nor a hairshirt but a deliberate ordering of priorities so as to distinguish between the necessary and the superfluous, useful and wasteful, beautiful and vulgar." Echoing Ralph Waldo Emerson, Shi adds: "Americans need to redress the imbalance between materialism and idealism in their pursuit of the good life."

So what can be done? We must create new and organized bands of public interest advocates dedicated to promoting the principle that the greatness of a people lies in who they are rather than in what and how much they buy. Existing groups—progressive, liberal and conservative—concerned about the collective good must begin to organize around this issue. Conferences, grass roots efforts, issue-focused organizing and public outeries in all media must become part of the new order of the 1990s.

Next, we have to insist that the advertising and marketing industries, working with educators, be considerably more mindful of the public good. Among other things, this means launching an "all fronts" educational ad campaign aimed at developing moderation in the marketplace.

Presently, there are a few encouraging signs of hope. For example, in a handful of U.S. secondary schools, parents and educators are challenging the consumptive ideal of clothing status by opting for uniforms in public schools. Similarly, more and more parents are setting an example in consumer moderation in their gradual move away from disposable diapers. Also, public interest and educational groups are uniting to combat massive alcohol marketing campaigns that target young consumers.

All of these efforts are small but, nevertheless, significant first steps that can help teach our children an important lesson in life. In the words of President Bush, "(We) are not the sum of our possessions. They are not the measure of our lives."

"Kids are big business, and big business needs youngsters compliant, vulnerable and hooked on their fads, fashions and addictions."

Ralph Nader

Ronald K.L. Collins teaches law at Catholic University and co-founded the Center for the Study of Commercialism, 1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, Ste. 300, Washington, DC 20009-5728, (202)332-9110. *Reprinted with permission from* ADBUSTERS Quarterly.

Illustrator John E. Santos is a free-lance artist and independent film contractor in Los Angeles.

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GROWING UP IN A MEDIA WORLD

By Robert Kubey

Although no one can crystal ball the future, the challenges and opportunities that the media present to children and adults in the 1990s are reasonably clear. Critical challenges revolve around how the media contribute to — and detract from — the socialization of children.

But much as media technologies are rapidly changing and raising new opportunities and concerns, the fundamental issue of socialization is not at all new. As Plato asked 2,300 years ago in *The Republic*: "Then shall we simply allow our children to listen to any story anyone happens to make up, and so receive into their minds ideas often the very opposite of those we shall think they ought to have when they are grown up?"

To be sure, the challenges facing those charged with the responsibility of raising and protecting children are complicated. On the one hand, a thoughtful and motivated parent of moderate income who is willing to make the effort can, with the aid of cable and a VCR, readily and regularly provide a child with well-produced, wholesome and stimulating television programming. Certainly, as research has shown, children can learn from programs like *Sesame Street*. Or they can gain a new view of nature by watching animals in their native habitat.

Commercial Domination

On the other hand, these same technologies can also enable children to readily and regularly see things that are not in their best interests — gratuitous violence, sexually explicit material and pornography top the list. And with so many new channels and means of reception, the potential for children to become dependent upon the medium and develop an entrenched viewing habit is greater than ever. My own research shows that television viewing can induce passivity both during viewing and in the short term afterward.

Underlying most problems concerning media and children is the commercial genesis of all too many contemporary productions. Most are created because someone concluded that a particular idea could make money by attracting children's attention, not because the idea behind a particular program would prepare children for life.

A psychologist overviews the problems and possibilities of raising children in today's society.

Every day on American television the best interests of children are being sacrificed to profit, and the problem has grown worse in recent years. From the beginning of the Reagan Administration, when the Federal Communications Commission moved to deregulate television, the number

of hours of children's programming offered by each of the networks has been cut – in one estimate by nearly two-thirds–from 11 hours a week to four hours a week, while the number of ads embedded in children's TV programs has risen.

And it's not enough that children are targeted in their homes. Movies are now riddled with paid-for product placements, including the advertising of products forbidden on TV. Philip Morris reportedly paid $350,000 for the placement of Lark cigarettes in a recent *James Bond* film and $42,500 to showcase Marlboros in *Superman II*.

Ads In Classrooms

Whittle Communications' *Channel One* is now targeting children in the classroom by providing each participating school with $50,000 worth of video equipment as long as the school requires students to watch two minutes of advertising embedded in a daily 10-minute news program. As an ad agency pitch to new clients noted, "Kids spend 40 percent of each day in the classroom where traditional advertising can't reach them. Now you can enter the classroom." One can only wonder what the outcry would be if Whittle simply paid the money directly to teachers to help supplement their salaries but required *them* to stand before students for two minutes each day extolling the virtues of Reeboks, Coke and Mars Bars.

"Every mass medium popular with children has been blamed for the problems of childhood — dime novels, comic books, movies, radio and video games as well as television."

Bennett Daviss, *Television&Families*

As with the news reports that Whittle offers, most of the programs on commercial television are made available as a way to interest children in products of dubious value: candy, gum and sugarcoated cereals. So sophisticated and cynical have toy manufacturers and the producers of children's television shows become that toy creation no longer waits until a children's show becomes popular. Today, television shows and toys are designed in tandem from their earliest inception, with the specific aim of promoting the toy in what some have called "program-length, free commercials" — a practice prohibited by the FCC only a decade ago.

And then there's the growing penchant for licensing and cross promotion. Disney has set up promotional tie-ins for its videos and movies with Coca Cola, Jell-O and McDonalds. Meanwhile, video game playing tips appear on Jell-O Pops. So regardless of what kids do or where they go they cannot escape the clever, increasingly interwoven advertising aims of large corporations who view kids simply as a lucrative target market.

The commercial domination of the media should not be taken lightly. Indeed, it may be that such domination is related, at least indirectly, to some of the most vexing of contemporary threats to children. People wonder why there is a widespread drug problem among today's youth, but rarely consider that advertisements instruct children (and adults) that by buying one nostrum or another, they needn't ever feel bad for long. People wonder why anorexia and bulimia now afflict a disturbing percentage of young women in our culture — or why tens of thousands of teenage boys involved in bodybuilding take dangerous steroids — but rarely consider that the commercial media incessantly instruct young people as to what kind of body type will attract the opposite sex.

Many observers wonder why the teenage suicide rate has increased dramatically in recent years. But they rarely consider the dubious value of our culture's use of fortune and fame as two main criteria for success. Young people are always searching for someone — or something — they can look up to. Too often, today's media promote consumption as the highest value. Perhaps that explains recent changes in what first-year college students expect from their education. Over the last 20 years, the number of surveyed students who say they hope college will help them develop a meaningful philosophy of life has shrunk enormously. At the same time, the percentage of students aiming to be financially well off has shot up by the same proportion.

A public well-educated in the nuances and methods of the visual media will both demand better quality and be less readily manipulated by them.

Involuntary Exposure

Industry spokespeople have argued for years that viewers who don't like what they see on television should turn it off. But this argument has never made sense for children who haven't yet developed the judgment to know when to turn the channel. As for the often-heard industry suggestion that "parents must be responsible," the fact remains that no parent, however well-intentioned, can reasonably be expected to monitor all of a child's viewing at home or away. With today's technology, even the best supervised 11-year-old can be down the street watching a violent, sexually explicit videocassette rented by his friend's mature-looking 16-year-old brother.

This problem of involuntary exposure is also increasing. Even 10- and 15-second promotions for violent or horrific late-night programs can cause fear and nightmares for some young children.

But TV isn't the only culprit. Involuntary viewing of movies occurs as well. Two, three and four-year-old children flying on airplanes become captive viewers in darkened cabins while parents are powerless to prevent them from viewing Rambo, Batman and other visual cinematic violence offered in the not-so-friendly skies.

Boys are also often exposed in a less than fully voluntary manner to violent material in the cinema, or on home video, in modern rites of passage that offer them a distorted sense of manhood. Research has demonstrated that frequent viewing of violence can result in young people becoming desensitized. And learning not to react to disgusting and hyperviolent images is one of the ways that boys are inducted into the

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non-feeling world of men. So millions of boys who want to appear manly to their friends, to avoid being ostracized, trek regularly to the local theater or video store and watch movies filled with chainsaws, machine guns and heads exploding graphically in slow motion.

Computers and video games are among the most exciting and hopeful media developments for children. Both can excite children about learning. Since computers and video games are programmed to challenge a child at the level of skill he or she has attained, they both promote learning at each child's own pace.

Although parents often see video play as wasted time this is not always the case. The hours children spend trying to improve their scores by asking inductive and deductive questions can enhance their reasoning abilities. But as with all technologies there are problems.

If most children are going to watch 1,000 hours of television every year for the rest of their lives, it is absurd for them not to receive formal education in the medium.

Double-Edged Swords

The educational potential of computer technology has only begun to be tapped. Children, typically, gravitate to the latest video game in which the toy's educational potential takes a back seat to flashy graphics, meaningless escapades, competition and mock destruction. As with the other media, commercial interests dictate the content of most games. And, there are now product placements in video games as well.

Furthermore, most video games are designed by men with a young male audience in mind. Must nearly every video game be competitive or reward a penchant for control and destruction? Must they continue the decades-long tradition of film and television gender stereotyping?

Video games promote gender inequality in another way. Since they represent many children's first exposure to technology, and since they're designed for boys, they contribute to boys getting a head start in becoming comfortable with technology. As our society becomes increasingly high tech, this may translate to career advantages later down the line.

The cornucopia of new media technology also helps to widen the longstanding information gap between rich and poor children. Poor families are especially unlikely to own personal computers or expensive software. Unless they receive adequate computer training in school (a rarity in lower-income school districts), they will also be disadvantaged in a workplace rapidly becoming more automated and computer dependent. And, poor children whose families cannot afford VCRs or cable television are less likely to benefit from the positive programming that these technologies can provide.

Suggestions For Action

What can be done? Ideally, media industries would regulate themselves more effectively and grow more sensitive to the needs of children. Unfortunately, the commercial system that underlies the financing system for children's programming and products makes that difficult. But the following points are worth considering:

1. The Motion Picture Association of America should adopt the film rating recommendations of Professor Barbara Wilson and her colleagues at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Their sensible ratings proposals, based on extensive research with children, focus on the potential harmful effects of certain types of entertainment content on children instead of basing ratings decisions on offensiveness to adults.
2. Loosely regulated commercial media industries do not effectively police themselves. Therefore, complaints about media content depend on constant pressure from advocacy groups and concerned citizens, with the government playing a minor role. Concerned parents and educators should express their views directly to their representatives, as well as to offending media companies and their commercial sponsors.
3. Congress should fund a new, commercially free, public television network designed to meet children's needs. This could be done annually for what the Department of Defense spends in four hours.
4. Without overdoing the oversight role, parents need to become more cognizant of how their children use the media and what they are viewing and listening to. Especially needed is parent-child dialogue that helps children think critically about what they are experiencing. (See article on page 29 for tips.)

Formal media education is critical because regardless of what happens on the other four fronts, research shows that children *can* learn to take the media seriously and analyze what they experience. Educational programs need to be developed not only for use in schools but also in day care centers, youth groups, scouting, churches, synagogues and summer camps, etc. If typical modern citizens are going to spend two to four hours every day watching television — and still more hours with movies, radio, audio cassettes, compact discs, video games and computers — they must learn how to better understand and appreciate what they are experiencing — now and in the future.

"What if all the programming were great? The television experience is still largely a passive one. Children are intrinsically doers and the medium lulls them into a passive state of observing."

Marianne Meyer, *Video Magazine*

Robert Kubey is a psychologist and assistant professor of communication at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. He is the author, with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, of Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience *(1990), Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 365 Broadway, Hillsdale, NJ 07642, (800)9-BOOKS-9, $19.95.*

Illustrator Jorge Molina is an art student at California State University, Los Angeles.

WIRED BEDROOMS:

Kids' Media Choices Made Behind Closed Doors

By William Cirone

The bedrooms of students in Santa Barbara County, California are wired. Television, telephones, stereos, radios and VCRs abound in striking numbers. Judging from the results and demographics of a study of media use by students in the Santa Barbara County school district in 1989, my guess is that this is the case almost everywhere.

We asked the 50,000 students in our county about their media consumption: How much TV do they actually watch? Outside of school assignments, do they ever read newspapers? Magazines? Books? And we included a question about the electronic items they have in their bedrooms.

We distributed the survey throughout the county's 23 school districts. Because its demographics couldn't be precisely controlled, we can't claim the results are statistically accurate. But the sheer size of the sample — 21,364 useable responses from students in kindergarten through twelfth grade — appears large enough to indicate some very significant trends.

The question on use of bedroom electronic equipment proved to be the most eye-opening of the survey. Up and down our county, a whopping 44 percent of the K-12 population reported having television sets in their bedrooms, and nearly 13 percent reported VCRs in their bedrooms.

Ironically, the percentages were *higher* in areas with lower socio-economic levels (as much as 60 percent or more), and in districts with more students whose families are migrant workers. In solid middle-class areas, the percentages of students with bedroom TVs dropped to an average of 30 to 35 percent.

There may be some practical reasons for this divergence. For example, in some cases, lower-income families may live in homes or apartments with only one major room. Such families also tend to make more use of television for childcare and year-round recreation. But the prevalence of televisions in bedrooms was still widespread throughout our large geographic area.

Perhaps the most telling comparison emerged when we correlated the incidence of wired bedrooms with academic performance. Strikingly, we found that "A" students were significantly less likely to have bedroom entertainment technology. Most especially, they owned fewer televisions, stereos and telephones.

This last figure apparently struck a nerve among our community members. In fact, many parents called to report "pulling the plug" in their children's bedrooms after reading the report we issued on the study.

But the reality is that media are omnipresent. Children will continue to be exposed to media messages in alarming quantities, even when parents attempt to restrict the quantity and content viewed at home. There are always friends' houses and other means available.

Concerned parents and educators need to remember that the viewing of TV shows and films — even those that we would prefer to have our young people avoid altogether — need not be a negative experience. Young people can be trained to recognize the values messages contained in the media they receive and evaluate them in an appropriate context.

It is clear that it is extremely important both to teach our young people these critical viewing skills and to have parents pay attention to the types and amounts of programs their children watch.

It will always be difficult to monitor what children watch, play and listen to on the other side of the bedroom door. In the end, critical viewing skills are the best way to extend parental influence into the wired bedroom.

"Sending a child to his or her room takes on a whole new meaning today if the child's room is linked to the outside world through television, radio, telephone and computer."

Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*

William J. Cirone is superintendent of schools for Santa Barbara County, California, and an advisor to the Center for Media and Values.

Illustrator Mark Flores is a free-lance artist in Los Angeles.

CREATING CARTOONS: REGULATION VS. SYNDICATION

By Kerry Gerot

"Knives. He throws knives. And tanks. Yeah, blows people away. Blood 'n guts."

"Really, you like that?"

"Yeah, he's cool."

A seven-year-old boy talking about the *G.I. Joe* cartoon.

Cartoons create more passion and discussion among individuals, interest groups and entire companies than perhaps any other television programming. From the children who sit enraptured and enthralled, to the parents whose concern over suitable content sometimes leads to outcries for regulation or even censorship — children's cartoons have never been a neutral issue.

In response to the concerns of parents and activists, NBC, ABC and CBS networks have all instituted a complex system of guidelines for writers and producers to follow as they create children's cartoons. Still, the airwaves are full of syndicated cartoons that are not subject to these standards — whose episodes have no small impact on their young audience.

Unlike the carefully reviewed network shows, syndication shows "are created by a production company working with a syndicator. They are sometimes *underwritten* by an advertiser," said Jeff Holder, director of children's programs at ABC. "Media critics need to distinguish between network and syndicated cartoons when they talk about violence and standards issues."

Syndicated cartoons — like *G.I.Joe* or *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* — frequently appear on weekday afternoons and are bought independently by stations from syndicators. They are not produced or licensed by a network, even if they appear on a network affiliated station. They are often created to fill a commercial need and are sold on a market to market basis to local network affiliates or independent stations who control the programming time.

Saturday morning cartoon shows like *New Kids on the Block*, *Beetlejuice* or *Dink the Dinosaur*, on the other hand, are approved for broadcast by the three network standards and practices departments and are subject to a corporate responsibility. Although guidelines vary from network to network, standards and practices regulations were enacted in response to years of

Characters and episodes from the New Kids on the Block *cartoon series are modeled after the lives of the heart-throb rock group of the same name.*

criticism of children's programming. They specifically restrict:

- Excessive violence;
- Actions that might be harmful if imitated by children, like eating bugs;
- Bad language and name calling;
- Inappropriate humor centering on sexual innuendo, substance abuse or ethnic jokes;
- Biased portrayal of controversial issues.

"We wouldn't dream of airing some of our Warner's package from 30 years ago," said Mary Conley, director of broadcast standards for children's programming at ABC, who has a Ph.D. in child development. "Some are dated, sadistic and violent. It's okay to preserve the material, but the exposure and public sensitivity is very high. We have to worry about the impact on a very small audience."

Obviously, the producers of a toy-based cartoon are interested in selling the product, just as network programmers want to create a good atmosphere for the child-based products sold during commercials. But those in control have different interests and that creates subtle variations in the two programming environments. "Syndication shows sometimes can be better than Saturday morning with the look, animation and money spent on them," suggested Kayte Kuch, one of two story editors on the new Saturday morning cartoon *New Kids on the Block* on ABC. "Disney is considered a syndicator."

Although they agree kids deserve protection Kuch and her partner Sheryl Scarborough, who create the cartoon series together and are both parents of young children themselves, feel the pinch of what they regard as excessive network oversight.

"If you watch Saturday morning cartoons, you'll see that no one is ever hurt, so a child never sees the consequences of violence," Kuch said. "We're also encouraged to deflect violence from the good guys and emphasize comedy. Because the networks think kids want characters to be consistent, character portrayals have less texture. For example, a typically optimistic character can't be pessimistic, even for a moment."

As Scarborough, who is president of Animation Writers of America, put it, "We're often forced to either sterilize or idealize. There's so much touchiness in dealing with children's programming. I think we err on the side of caution."

Aside from working with standards and practices, the cartoon creative process is not an easy one. It is a team effort in which the end product depends on the collaboration of workers thousands of miles apart.

Cartoons owe their genesis to many

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sources: toys, videos, films, rock groups, even original ideas. But an extremely competitive market and a high risk of commercial failure heavily favors concepts and characters based on toys or storylines with which children are already familiar.

Once a project is sold the writers constantly create and recreate stories for the weekly episodes. Successive drafts of outlines must be approved by production company staffers, network executives and standards and practices department staff members. Later, the same levels of authority must approve all scripts.

The script that survives this tortuous approval process then enters production. The artistic team that creates it includes many specialists, from the story board artist responsible for the visual interpretation of the written script to model makers who create the actual character models, from background artists who design the scenes to the color key artist who adjusts colorization to television's needs.

Once the basic creative planning is finished, animators in Korea or other Asian countries complete the actual drawings, the inking and painting of cells (the frame by frame drawings that create the action) and the camera work.

While the overseas production is being done numerous technical functions must continue back at the home production facility. Track readers match the mouth motions of speaking characters to voices, directors work out scene timing and layout specialists plan their flow. Post-production begins when overseas art and filmwork is completed. Finally, the nearly completed filmed cartoon is ready for final viewing and assignment of an air date.

Coordination of all these levels of production while continuing planning for upcoming episodes is an inordinately complex and demanding process with a high level of commercial risk.

In fact, cartoons seldom generate profits for either production companies or networks until after they are sold for syndication reruns, sometimes years after initial production. Fear of failure and the long wait for returns help explain the difficulty of selling unusual or original concepts and unrecognizable characters.

Cartoon producers have words of praise for the environmentally oriented syndicated cartoon series Captain Planet and the Planeteers.

But the debate and criticism of cartoon content are only symptomatic of a larger problem in children's programming — the lack of quality, diversity and choice, believes Peggy Charren, president of Action for Children's Television. "No particular program is a problem. The problem is choice. You can't watch quality programs if they aren't there. It's the range of programming that is lacking. Broadcasting hasn't begun to address this issue except on public television."

> *"Cartoon regulation is kind of like taking a victim who's been run over by a train and putting bandaids on one by one."*
>
> **Sheryl Scarborough, president of Animation Writers of America**

Charren agrees with Kuch and Scarborough: "Cartoon regulation is kind of like taking a victim who's been run over by a train and putting bandaids on one by one. Once you start questioning all the constraints — what you get is the lowest common denominator, a realm of unreality in trying to protect the kids," said Scarborough.

All three point to *The Simpsons* as an example of good cartoon television. "Bart Simpson is the best commercial cartoon on television. It has a sense of itself artistically. Where are the writers who could create really great heroes, three-dimensional characters and reality?" Charren said.

But Scarborough and Kuch contend that the regulatory bandaids that bind them would prevent Bart Simpson, the wisecracking, mischievous son on *The Simpsons*, from ever appearing on Saturday morning cartoons. "You can't tell half-truths, like Bart does, on Saturday morning. Bart is like a real kid. The breakthrough of *The Simpsons* will help Saturday cartoons because they're characters with real texture. They can do things in *The Simpsons*, as well as in feature films like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, that we could never do," Scarborough said.

Both Charren and the writers cited the syndication show *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*, produced by DIC Enterprises and Turner Broadcasting, as another example of good cartoon television. The characters are diverse and the stories deal with environmental themes encouraging kids to help the earth.

But critics and creators alike are beginning to agree that the overall unreality and lack of diversity of Saturday morning cartoons may actually be as detrimental to children as the number of times a *G.I. Joe* flings his knife or shoots his tank against an aggressor. One-dimensional characters and sanitized situations do not lend themselves to the enhancement of a child's experience of the world any more than a whacked head or a combat explosion.

"Take out all the psychology stuff. Let things be fun or more realistic so we stop sheltering kids so much. Let them learn the consequences of dealing with each other, see how a character deals with anger and the consequences that follow actions in real life," Scarborough said.

Ultimately, Charren and the two writers agree that parental involvement and entertainment choice is the key to quality children's programming. "Far too many parents want somebody else to regulate rather than get involved themselves. I definitely monitor what my children are watching even though it's difficult to do all the time," said Kuch. Holder added, "As a new parent I would at least like to be familiar with what my child is watching. The key to it all is the distinction between good and bad, realizing that somebody is trying to sell me something here or entertain me there. Adults need to discern also."

Kerry Gerot is managing editor of Media&Values.

ACTION AND ACTIVISM:
An Interview with ACT's Peggy Charren

As the founder of Action for Children's Television, the United States' leading organization promoting awareness of issues relating to children's television, Peggy Charren has spent decades working for legislation requiring TV broadcasters to pay attention to children's needs. In a recent conversation with Media&Values' *editor Rosalind Silver, she discussed the impact of the Children's Television Act of 1990, which became U.S. law on October 18. Staff writer Ira Rifkin also participated in the interview.*

M&V: *You've been pushing for this or similar legislation for a long time. Now that the bill has passed, what do you see as its main significance?*

Charren: It provides a never-before-available hook for a community to hang its concerns about children's television. Thanks to its provision that broadcasters must serve the "educational and informational needs of children through programming," each broadcaster's actions on children's programming will become part of the public record and hopefully publicized by local media during the FCC's five-year review of the station's license. So individuals and groups trying to make a case for higher quality will only have to check the public record instead of spending hours on monitoring.

Ultimately, the act should help the public concentrate on what's missing from children's television, not just on what's on. But it will only be effective to the extent that parents, teachers, health professionals and pediatricians — all those concerned about children — use it as an opportunity.

M&V: *How will new regulations help them deal with chronic problems?*

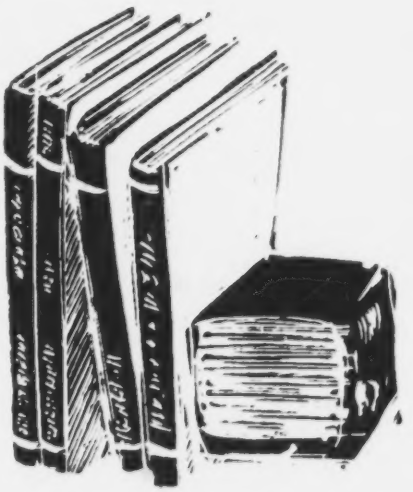
Charren: Too often, when communities look at television, the effort is to get something off the air. Not only is that censorship, but it doesn't deal with the real problem, the dearth of quality informational programs and dramas designed with children in mind. I hope these provisions will make it harder for broadcasters to claim that showing a few cartoons is all they need to do to serve children.

M&V: *What about the restrictions on children's advertising?*

Charren: As part of its mandate to "protect children from overcommercialization" the bill does limit advertising in children's television programming to a cap of 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends and 12 minutes on weekdays. Most stations are already doing this but at least the bill formalizes it for the future.

M&V: *Aren't the regulations required by the bill still an unknown quantity?*

Charren: Yes, and that's why ACT will be following the rulemaking provisions of the legislation very carefully. The FCC is supposed to issue a proceeding describing applicable standards within the next few months. We'll



be responding to this with our own set of guidelines, hopefully by spring.

M&V: *Do you feel that your goals have changed now that the legislation has passed?*

Charren: We still have the same goals we've always had: making the time children spend with television as terrific as possible. That can mean anything from running an awards program to talking to schools to filing complaints with the Federal Trade Commission. In fact, we have a pending FTC complaint stating that television ads promoting 900 number calling for children are deceptive advertising. We criticized Channel One (the Whittle Communications project that brings advertising-supported cable into the public schools) because those ads were on television, even though they appear on TVs in classrooms. The question of advertising is crucial, because we will continue concentrating on the over-commercialization of children's TV, like the proliferation of toy-based cartoon shows, which are really just one long commercial. The particular problem with kids is that they don't mind being told what to buy. In fact, they like being what I call the nation's greatest unpaid sales force. They simply do not know the difference

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between ads and entertainment. That's why I'm so appalled at the Channel One concept.

M&V: *So what are parents to do?*

Charren: If you're just talking about searching for the best television, alternative media are one option. Family cable networks do provide some interesting choices. Unfortunately, some of what they broadcast is also quite destructive and nauseating. That means parents still have to monitor what their children watch.

Home video is probably the best bet for parents. It provides a lot more choice. The problem is that parents need to be educated as to which videos are best and they need discretionary income to buy or rent them.

In fact, the financial impact of alternative media has scared station owners, which may make them more sensitive to community concerns. That's another reason we needed legislation mandating a commitment to children needs.

Further information about the activities of Action for Children's Television can be obtained by writing: Action for Children's Television, 20 University Road, Cambridge, MA 02138; (617)876-6620.

Other Options: Canadians Tackle Children's TV

David Schatzky, executive director of Canada's Children's Broadcast Institute, shares some ideas on children's television programming.

M&V: *How would you describe the state of children's broadcasting in Canada?*

Schatzky: In general, I would say the Canadian broadcasting system is more committed to providing quality children's television than that of the United States. For one thing, service to children has long been a specific criterion considered for station licensing. The government-funded CBC also provides major support for children's programming. More stringent advertising regulations limit the number of ads directed to children to eight minutes per hour. A strict code limits celebrity endorsements and other presentations in advertising that might mislead children.

Many gaps remain, however. With programs like *Anne of Green Gables*, *Degrassi Junior High*, *Canadian Sesame Street* and *The Elephant Show*, the CBC has an admirable track record. Yet it still airs American sitcoms like *The Golden Girls* at a key youngster viewing time, 5:30 p.m. on weeknights!

M&V: *Are you concerned about the impact of U.S. television on Canadian children?*

Schatzky: Yes, like almost everyone else in the world. But for us, the U.S. is right next door. In fact, as the head of an organization that works with broadcasters, regulators and educators to promote quality children's television in Canada, U.S. influence is one of the issues I worry about most. Most Canadians watch more American television than anything else. *The Cosby Show*, for example, is the number one program with Canadian kids. It's also easier and cheaper for Canadian broadcasters to purchase American programs than create their own.

M&V: *Aren't there regulations that mandate a certain percentage of Canadian content?*

Schatzky: They help to encourage Canadian programming, but at present, they don't address children's programming in general. The proposed new Federal broadcasting act does specifically single out "children of all ages" as a segment of the audience broadcasters must serve. But at the moment it appears to be stalled.

M&V: *What about the situation in Quebec?*

Schatzky: That's another matter, and certainly problematic. Since 1980, the entire province of Quebec has banned TV commercials aimed at children under 13 on all broadcast media, private or public. Unfortunately, the ban has had the effect of cutting the amount of air time devoted to children's shows. Without commercial revenue, there was no incentive for producers and broadcasters to serve the child audience. This is pretty discouraging.

M&V: *What would you like to see happen in the future?*

Schatzky: Canadians are capable of creating vital children's programs. But what's still required is a stronger commitment from the private sector, more persuasion from regulators, more creative funding and program distribution, and an outcry from an acquiescent population.

M&V: *In other words, we all have a lot to work for.*

Schatzky: That's right.

For more information, write to The Children's Broadcast Institute, Ste. 405, 234 Eglinton Ave. East, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4P 1K5.

Quality Programming for Children...

- Allows children to not merely be onlookers, but to be important participants or actors, if not main characters, and to play an active role (in the program).
- Is designed to promote the intellect, emotions and creativity of children in a systematic fashion that helps them make strides in their personal development.
- Respects the intelligence and critical judgment of children and their ability to reflect by avoiding oversimplification, stereotypes, propaganda and intellectual laziness.
- Tries to meet the needs and expectations of different child age groups and uses pertinent studies in order to do so.
- Provides a world view by paying special attention to reality and yet still inspires the imagination and opens up worlds of the family, friends, school, street, city society, earth and universe.

—Excerpts from the Quality Statement of The Children's Broadcast Institute, Canada.

But What Do I Say?

FIVE IMPORTANT IDEAS TO TEACH YOUR KIDS ABOUT TV

By Jay F. Davis

You've probably heard that, as a modern-day parent, you should be watching TV with your kids and discussing what they see and hear. A recent statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics, for example, states "Parents should watch television with their children in order to help interpret what they see." In fact, just about everyone who gives advice about children and TV these days is saying, "Discuss television with your children!"

If you're like me, however, this kind of advice only causes you to breathe in through clenched teeth.

Not that I disagree. I mean, it's a good idea to talk about all kinds of things with your children. Things like sex, drugs, schoolwork, curse words, discipline, elbows on the table, dating, rock music. But at least with most of these topics, I kind of know what to say. With television, I'm stumped. Even when I have the time and energy to watch TV with them, I don't know what to look for. And what should I say when I see something that disturbs me?

I don't need any more authorized spokespersons telling me I ought to do it. What I need are some specific suggestions, some examples, some simple ideas that will help me really finally do it — and do it without sounding like an unreasonable or out-of-touch parent.

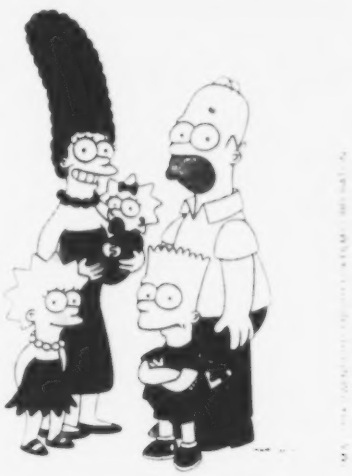
So I want to suggest some ways to put some method in our madness about television. The method I suggest is based on *five basic principles of media literacy*. These principles, I think, can help perplexed parents base their criticisms of TV on something besides their own likes and dislikes.

For example, instead of saying, "I don't like that show because it's too violent," or "Can't you watch something educational?", the following five concepts can help you introduce some reasoned discourse into your everyday discussion of television. I think you'll find, as I have, that your children — and you — will quickly become savvy TV viewers.

#1. *You're Smarter than Your TV.*

Let's face it, if we weren't smarter than our TVs — or at least different from the people in them — our lives would be dominated by gunfights, drug deals and quickly resolved livingroom fights. Fortunately, we don't do everything or believe everything we see on TV, and neither do our children. Yes, there are probably ways in which TV affects us that we're not aware of, but in the end we still make our own decisions.

What this means is that you and I determine (or at least influence) how television



With a little imagination, popular shows such as The Simpsons *can become a tool for untangling commercials.*

affects us and what we get from it. For example, as incongruous as it sounds, you could talk about homelessness while watching *The Cosby Show*. Consider the off-chance that a scruffy-looking woman enters the Huxtable's living room: "She looks like that homeless woman we saw downtown yesterday," you say.

"Yeah," says your five-year-old, "except that lady we saw would never come into the Huxtable's house — she was too dirty."

"You think Cosby gives money to the homeless?" you ask.

"I don't know," says the five year-old.

"We could write him and ask," you say.

How on earth did you end up talking about *the homeless* while watching *The Cosby Show*? You connected something from your everyday life to something you saw on TV.

Making connections with things in everyday life is probably the easiest way to alter or enhance the messages of television without interfering with your children's favorite shows. It's based on the concept that each of us have "filters" that affect our reception of messages. The idea, then, is to develop similar "filters" in our children that cause them to think of other things — "real life" things — when they see a McDonald's commercial or Bugs Bunny or "bedroom kissing" on TV. This can be especially effective when you begin pointing out interactions on television that parallel ideas from your children's reading or from books you've read to them.

Unfortunately, television can't make these connections for us, but it can provide the opportunity for them. TV can be a way of expanding our world — so that our children want to do *more* reading, play *more* games, even do more creative school work. You can help make this happen by connecting events from everyday experience — no matter how off-the-wall — to the stories your children see on television. With a little experience, your children will learn that they can determine whether TV inspires them or bores them — that they really *are* smarter than the TV.

#2. *TV's World Is Not Real.*

This point is so obvious it seems foolish. All the same, when we watch the news or a presidential debate or a documentary or a nature show, it's natural to assume that what we see and hear is real and true, especially when these shows are compared with sitcoms and musicals. But in all

honesty. I don't reserve this assumption for just newslike shows. For example, do you remember that laundry detergent commercial where the man in the laundromat is making a mess of "separating his colors?" The outcome is so predictable: An attractive woman finally comes over to rescue the man, and they end up with a date.

When I went to college, I remember going to the laundromat prepared to pretend I didn't know how to "separate my colors" in the hope that I'd meet a blonde bombshell who would "rescue" me. I really did this. It took me several laundromat trips to realize that this scenario was somebody's fantasy.

Children, particularly girls and boys under seven, are especially vulnerable to the illusion that the events portrayed on television — like my detergent commercial — are real. According to developmental theory, it's not until about second grade that children develop the intellectual ability to tell the difference between what's real and what's imaginary. So the parents of young children need to be particularly aware of the "unreal" nature of television.

For example, maybe one Saturday morning you're fixing breakfast while your six-year-old daughter watches cartoons. A Barbie commercial comes on. It's clever. Even you are enthralled for a moment. Then suddenly you exclaim "Aw, that's not real, they're trying to make you think that all that sand and ocean and sun come with Barbie. Did you fall for it?"

"No," your daughter hesitates, with a quizzical look on her face. Then her face clears as she remembers that all the things Barbie does are really "just pretend."

Or, pull out strange pieces of knowledge that you've collected over the years about how TV is made: "That's probably white glue in that bowl and not milk. They use glue on TV because it keeps the cereal from getting soggy."

Or: "Have you noticed that the music always seems less happy (minor key) whenever the bad guy comes on?."

Or: "How come Theo (*The Cosby Show*) seldom studies? Do you think he has as much homework as you?"

But use these comments sparingly. No one likes to have their fun turned into a lesson. I find it works well to intersperse several comments in one show, then leave the subject alone for several shows or days afterwards. Your goal should be to make your children skeptical of what they see on TV so that they start to question on their own. Remember, television is never equal to real life.

Learning about common sitcom techniques like laugh-tracks can help kids better understand popular television shows such as Roseanne.

Making connections with things in everyday life is probably the easiest way to alter or enhance the messages of television without interfering with your children's favorite shows.

#3. *TV Teaches Us that Some People Are More Important than Others.*

I talk to my TV. I suppose some people would say this is definite proof that I'm finally off the deep end, but I like to look at it another way: I need to keep reminding myself not only that TV is not real, but that TV subtly tells me that some people are more important than others.

So I tell the phosphorescent image of Ted Koppel: "If you interviewed Alice Walker (the African-American and feminist author of *The Color Purple*) about the causes of war... or poverty... or the budget deficit... you'd get a different story."

But it's not just that certain people's — like Alice Walker's — opinions are under-represented on TV. When African-Americans, women, Latinos, Asians or Native Americans — in fact, non-male, non-white groups in general — are seen on TV, they are usually crooks or kidnappers or secretaries or hatchet "men." On the whole, TV presents a generally male and white perspective on the world — everyone else is less important and much more likely to get killed.

Talking back to your TV is probably one of the best strategies for reminding yourself and your children of this questionable — but painfully accurate — picture of reality. When you see something that you think is biased in whatever direction, add your own two cents, especially if your kids are around.

My dad used to do it. Whenever he was watching news clips about the war in Vietnam, he'd angrily interject his opinions on top of the reporter's commentary. This running dialog is one of the primary things I remember about television as a child. I learned from Dad that if I want my children to know my values and beliefs, they need to hear them above what they hear on TV.

But don't just talk back when you're watching the news. If the portrayal of women is one of your issues, and you're watching a commercial for women's clothing, you might say: "Only models really look like that. Do you know anybody who looks like her?"

#4. *TV Keeps Doing the Same Things Over and Over Again.*

One of the great things about television is that it keeps finding new material, new ways to do old things, new ways to do new

Whoopi Goldberg and Demi Moore share an emotional moment from the hit feature film Ghost *— but not the romantic scene that preceded it.*

things, new topics and new people and new places and new this and new that and even new news. In fact, there's a lot of variety on television. So what do I mean when I say that television keeps doing the same things over and over again?

Well, I mean that it keeps using laugh-tracks. And scary music. And romantic music. And candlelight. And close-ups. And chase scenes. And the women always wear makeup, even in bed. And the men look muscular. And news anchors always look at the camera. And they seldom say a wrong word.

It's not the shows that are the same, it's the techniques, the conventions, the way they go about making the shows. Say you're watching *Roseanne* with your 10-year-old son, and you've decided that tonight you're going to count laugh-tracks. "Okay," you say to him as *Roseanne* starts, "I'm going to count laugh-tracks."

"What? Why?" asks your son, obviously puzzled.

"Oh, I've been reading this article about how TV shows are put to together and it suggested counting how many times the audience laughs."

"Why?"

"Because I'm trying to learn about the way TV does things over and over."

If your son doesn't volunteer to help right away, my bet is that if you miss one laugh track, he'll say "you missed one." Then you're off and running. You can count all kinds of things, you can even get more tricky and try to figure out, for example, if there's a way that models touch things in commercials. Women in magazine advertisements tend to touch objects daintily, whereas men grab them lustily. Does this happen in TV commercials also? And what is this teaching us about female and male roles?

Not only is television always trying to grab the largest audience it can, more importantly, it's trying to grab the largest audience with the highest possible disposable income.

One of my favorite activities is to give attention to the music used in TV shows. Before a show, you might say to your child, "I'm going to analyze the music in this show tonight, would you like to help?" I simply note with a pencil what happens in the show each time the music changes. After doing this two or three times, you and your children will begin to notice patterns in how music is used. (See pages 29-30 for some other ideas.)

Looking for these common television techniques is one of the more interesting and revealing ways to demystify TV for your children. With a little effort, you can schedule a trip to a local TV station where you and your children (or their class or Scout troop or church group) can ask all kinds of questions about how television is made. You might even be able to sit in on production of the local evening news. As a result your children will find it much harder to watch TV like couch potatoes. It's hard to watch in the same way when you start noticing makeup on sleeping women.

#5. *Somebody's Always Trying to Make Money With the TV.*

The last principle is perhaps the most important. It also impacts my family most directly. I'd like to be able to control the Ninja Turtle/Strawberry Shortcake mania that infects my children and their friends. The question is: What part does television play in eliciting this craze?

The place to begin is with the understanding that just about everything we see on TV is affected by the bottom line. Not only is television always trying to grab the largest audience it can, more importantly, it's trying to grab the largest audience with the highest possible *disposable income*. In a real sense, nothing else matters. Most everything we see on TV is concocted to attract those with money and to make those who don't have it, want it.

Make this fact obvious to your children. You can begin by looking at the commercials in the different kinds of shows you're viewing. Say you're watching a basketball game and a Nike Air Jordan commercial comes on. You might say to your kids, "I like this commercial. How come we never see it when we're watching *The Simpsons*?" They'll probably say, "I don't know." But if you're lucky, one of them will say "Because most of the people who watch *The Simpsons* don't necessarily use Nike Air Jordans," and you'll be off and running (and jumping). At any rate, once you've explained it once or twice, they'll begin to catch on.

You can also try predicting the types of commercials that you expect to see on certain shows. On a sitcom about single mothers, for example, you might expect products that would appeal to women: personal hygiene products, underwear, household items. An action-adventure show, on the other hand, might feature beer commer-

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cials, razor blades or automobiles. After you make your predictions, notice how accurate you are and talk about the reasons why you were correct or incorrect. This is a great activity for younger children, because it helps them identify when commercials start and end, a basic skill for young viewers.

Also, don't forget to point out that both networks and television stations make their money by selling commercials. This means that every show they put on the air has to attract viewers for them to be profitable. Make sure your children understand that it doesn't really matter if they like a particular show — not unless millions of other viewers like it too.

And, if you ever notice a brand-name product in a movie, don't miss your chance to say "I wonder how much they paid to have Burt Reynolds use Tide in that scene?" "Product placement," as they call it, is a very lucrative business in Hollywood these days. It's a hidden form of advertising. Unless you know this you might assume the scriptwriter or set dresser picked these brands as appropriate for the character.

You may even notice that a potentially controversial scene was axed or avoided in a TV show or movie. For example, the movie *Ghost* features a scene where Whoopi Goldberg's body is possessed by a white man's ghost. He then dances (in Whoopi Goldberg's body) with his former (white) girlfriend, but rather than show the two women dancing, the movie shows the man and his girlfriend dancing. To my seven-year-old, I might say "Don't you think it would have made more sense for the two women to dance there? Why do you suppose they didn't do it that way?" The answer, of course, has a lot to do with money. My guess is that the producers were afraid of dealing too directly with lesbian and racial issues. They didn't want to scare away potential patrons by making the movie "too controversial."

Make sure your children understand that it doesn't really matter if they like a show — not unless millions of other viewers like it too.

Now is the Time!

It's important for your children to understand that just about everything we see on TV is impacted by someone's desire to make money. Assume that there are no pure motives. Even the news is influenced by commercial constraints, with a stiff competition for ratings at the top of the list. The acquisition of networks and television stations by worldwide conglomerates with their own complex profit making agendas has made the situation more problematic.

Although most of these five basic concepts can be assimilated in some form by any child old enough to turn a television dial, many adults never grasp them. All the more reason to start early teaching the concepts of media literacy to your children. Before long, they'll be spotting new examples before you do. When you find your kids using these principles to analyze the programs you watch — and it may not be long — then you'll know that they've learned the five principles of media literacy. And maybe you'll have a fighting chance at persuading them that they don't need the latest heavily advertised jeans, athletic shoes or Nintendo game cartridge.

Jay F. Davis is educational services coordinator for the Center for Media and Values. He often watches television with Sean, 8, and Garrett, 6.

To learn more about media literacy, see page 32 and contact the Center for Media and Values, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034; (213)202-1936.

How to Enjoy Commercial-Free TV

Most children watch about 20,000 commercials a year, but that doesn't mean they have to continue watching this many. Creative use of the VCR, public television channels, video rental shops and public libraries can help them and you enjoy TV viewing without being sold a bill of goods.

1. Tape now for future viewing. Encourage kids to save their favorite shows to watch later. Taping them and re-airing them — zapping through the commercials — helps children learn to substitute outside play, homework and chores for afternoon cartoons and reruns. As an added bonus, you have a chance to screen their program selections if you wish. The tapes are available for repeated reruns.

2. Create adless tapes. Commercials can be erased from existing tapes, but why see them even once! Small children can learn to use video remotes to stop recording whenever commercials come on, and they're usually excited about practicing the technique. At the same time they learn that commercials are dispensable and disposible.

3. Establish a family video library. With these tools, even young children can learn to "produce" their own favorite program recordings for future use — and incidentally make them commercial-free at the same time. Parent-approved "family library" tapes need no future screening for replays.

4. Explore public television. High-quality programming goes far beyond *Sesame Street*. Check the schedule listings for children's specials, educational programs and cartoons. Nature shows and documentaries often appeal to children or address their special interests. These nearly commercial-free offerings are ripe for taping.

5. Check out the library. Increasingly, public libraries, schools, religious and community institutions stock excellent general and special-interest videos for the borrowing — most of them commercial-free.

6. Avoid program-length commercials. Children clamoring to rent or buy programs featuring the latest cartoon character or action figure can learn to think twice about the intentions behind their favorite shows. Knowing that the programs were created to sell the products — not the reverse — is the first step to commercial awareness.

7. Fight kidvid ads. Unfortunately, some of the same sponsors who brought you cartoons-as-products are invading the children's video market. If at all possible, buy or rent only commercial-free videos.

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REFLECTION/ACTION FORUM

Behind the Screen

When Kids Are Watching: Confessions of a Sitcom Producer

By Gary David Goldberg

The Family Ties *producers always remained aware of the Emmy-winning sitcom's youngest audience.*

The insidious thing about television's invasion of the home is not the message of its programs, but the audience that is watching. The sobering reality a prime-time television producer must face is that eight- and 10-year-old children are left alone to watch TV by themselves.

How do children, lacking in mature judgement, process what they see? How do they tell good from bad, truth from fiction, fantasy from reality? Without parents to guide their interpretations of the wild onslaught of information flowing out of that wonderful yet menacing box, what is presented on TV becomes the primary source of the child's developing world view.

The first reaction of a prime-time producer to this realization is indignation: I didn't ask to have a show that eight-year-olds are watching by themselves. Why should I be responsible for how they translate what they see? They shouldn't be watching by themselves.

But, they are. One can't avoid that fact and must face it responsibly. Many times during the course of *Family Ties*, we had to take that lone eight-year-old viewer into account. Should we use that ambiguous joke about drug use, which didn't come down heavily with a Nancy Reagan "Just Say No" message? What if the subtlety of our more dramatic and artful approach was lost on the kid whose mother or father wasn't there to make the message clear? In this case, like many others, we ended up dropping the joke altogether.

Given the growing weakness of the family in America today, I think it is incumbent upon producers to be responsible and take the nature of the audience into consideration. Having said this, we must acknowledge that the people producing shows in Hollywood also have a strong argument. The people doing *Dallas*, for example, have the right to say, "Hey, this isn't for kids. They shouldn't be watching. If I let that concern overwhelm my show I'm going to lose my audience." And, if you're doing *Miami Vice* at 10 p.m., is it the fundamental responsibility of the producer to take into account the eight-year-olds who shouldn't be up at that hour watching TV by themselves? However, the closer we get to the prime-time hour—in the 8 or 8:30 p.m. time period—the greater our sense of responsibility to the audience should be.

In the end, the fundamental responsibility must lie with the parents, not the producers. In my own admittedly privileged case, if my young daughter wanted to watch TV in our house, she would have to make a case for turning it on: why did she want to watch it, what did she think about what she saw, why should we allow this into our home?

"The widespread use of television is equivalent to a broad social decision to allow young children to be present at wars and funerals... criminal plots and cocktail parties."

Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*

So, as much as I believe in the responsibility of those of us on the production end, the real issue is the strength of families, not the weakness of programming.

Gary David Goldberg is president of UBU Productions, creator of Family Ties *and executive producer of* American Dreamer. *Reprinted with permission from New Perspectives Quarterly.*

Video Games

Nintendo Crescendo: One Mother's Solution

By Ramona Pence

"I'm going to blow a hole in the guy!" "I squashed him!"

As a mother, I didn't need the report from the National Coalition on Television Violence, stating that 71 percent of Nintendo games involve some kind of combative activity, to become concerned about the aggressive feelings incited by the popular video toys. The excited cries in my living room give me ample proof of the "general hostility and pent-up aggression it can unleash in players."

But when my nine-year-old son became more interested in his Nintendo "level" than his report card, I started to wonder about the obsessive nature of the game.

- Could it cause seizures? (He had his first after we bought the game.)
- Could it be sexist? Boys seem to become obsessed while girls play only occasionally. In fact, research shows that 60 percent of players are boys.
- Are my children being exploited? With $3.4 billion worth of home video games and cartridge sales in 1989, not to mention themed breakfast cereal, a magazine, cartoon shows and a range of consumer products, the potential for commercialism is hardly insignificant. The expense of the initial system (nearly $100) and the seemingly endless supply of cartridges (starting at $20) is a major outlay for most families.

A little research turned up a few more facts, but they didn't alleviate my worry. Nintendo advocates believe the games promote hand-eye coordination, problem-solving ability and quick decision making. The "body knowledge" that Nintendo play creates may even be translated to the nervous system, according to Michael Streibel, an educational technology specialist at the University of Wisconsin.

Or, as one of my son's friends told me: "I like Nintendo because I can try and try again. I like to be the character in the game. I like to be the one controlling the guy."

So what's a parent to do? Even if I favored it (and I don't), outright prohibition would make my son feel resentful and left out. And he could still play with his friends' games. But just as obviously, Nintendo joins television as a media pastime good only in small doses. Its play must be supervised and parents must help their children stay moderate "users" by setting firm rules. Here are the ones our family has agreed to:

The best-selling Nintendo character Mario (from Super Mario Bros.) has spawned a cartoon spin-off.

- **Confine play to a room or area.** In our case, restricting play to the baby's room and allowing it only if she isn't asleep or playing has cut time considerably.
- **Set guidelines for games.** We stipulate the purchase of only non-violent or at least non-warlike games; supplemental products are not allowed.
- **Establish time limits.** Most parents will want to keep children outside as much as possible and make sure that homework and chores are finished first.
- **Avoid weekly updates.** Our children receive new cartridges as gifts only on birthdays, holidays and other similar occasions. They may purchase games with their own allowances or earnings, but only after trying them out through trade or rental.

Like television, Nintendo should not be used as a babysitter. Adults who make an effort to suggest other family activities will find their kids are still interested in pitching a ball or baking cookies.

In Japanese "nintendo" means "work hard, but in the end it's in heaven's hands." It takes hard work to give children back the play they deserve. As parents, we must never stop trying to prevent commercial products from "zapping" our children's time and attention. If we work together as families to agree on our own Nintendo rules, we can ensure that the power to play continues to rest with the child, and not with figures on a screen.

Ramona Pence is a teacher, communications expert and the mother of three.

> *"Will kids who spend too much time in Nintendo's rational, electronic reality have trouble dealing with the mundane, less-than-rational world they return to?"*
>
> **Los Angeles Times**

Playing with Games

Nintendo of America has given a new meaning to the phrase "hands off." Its new "Hands-Free Controller" extends the fun of the popular video entertainment system to players with limited physical abilities. Game play raises disabled youngsters' self-esteem by giving them common ground with their peers, experts say.

Some facts from Nintendo:

- The monthly *Nintendo Power* magazine is the largest circulation paid-subscription publication in the eight to 15 age category, with a circulation of 1.5 million.
- A team of more than 150 game counselors answer 50,000 calls per week from Nintendo fans seeking game tips and strategies.
- Twenty percent of Nintendo players fall into the 25-44 age range, while 25 percent are female, according to company figures for 1988.
- U.S. household penetration of Nintendo products was 21 percent in 1989, with 29 percent forecast for 1990.

Violence

Quiz and Questions Probe Impact of Violence

By Parker Page

A TV Violence Quiz for Parents

	Me-as-a-child	My child	Same
1. Who watches more TV?	☐	☐	☐
2. Who sees more acts of TV violence?	☐	☐	☐
3. Who watches a greater percentage of violent shows?	☐	☐	☐
4. Who sees more realistic-looking violence?	☐	☐	☐
5. Who sees more programs in which the heroes use violence to solve conflicts?	☐	☐	☐
6. Who is more likely to watch TV without an adult in the room?	☐	☐	☐
7. Who is more likely to play with toys based on charcters seen on violent TV shows?	☐	☐	☐
8. Who knows more about TV violence and its effects?	☐	☐	☐

"When I was a kid, I saw hours of violent programs, and it didn't affect me. So why should I worry about my child?"

Even if this comforting conclusion is true (and how can any parents be *sure* they were unaffected by the violent programs they watched as children?) viewing habits and television standards have been drastically transformed since the '50s and '60s. There *is* still plenty to worry about.

The questions below can help you focus on the ways things have changed — and how they've stayed the same (or gotten worse). Once you've answered them, and pondered your own opinions, read the research-based interpretations below.

1. Who watches more TV?

Today's children do. In 1989, an average household's TV set was turned on for *seven hours and two minutes* a day. That figure has increased significantly from five hours and 30 minutes a day in 1965. The number of families watching TV has also skyrocketed. In 1960, some 45 million households owned a TV set; by 1989 that number had almost doubled.

2. Who sees more acts of TV violence?

Results are just in, and the news is not good. While prime-time violence remains at a steady five to six violent acts per hour, violence on Saturday morning cartoons shows aimed at children in the 1980s rose to 26.4 or more violent acts per hour, a dramatic increase tallied in the most recent violence profile released in early 1990 by researchers at Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication and the University of Delaware. According to co-director George Gerbner, who has been tracking network TV violence since 1967, children's shows feature numerous examples of abuse of characters, with humor disguising messages of power. And this doesn't even count the frequent repetition of videos and recorded programs, which allow children to watch violent shows over and over again.

3. Who watches a greater percentage of violent shows?

Although violent programs such as *Bonanza* and *The Untouchables* aired a generation ago, the percentage of violent programming is far greater today. Causes include expansion of cable television and the recycling of action adventure shows in afterschool and early-evening time slots. Programs such as *Miami Vice* and *Magnum P.I.*, as well as movies produced for adults, are now seen by children as they munch on their afterschool snacks.

4. Who sees more realistic-looking violence?

There have always been barroom brawls, shootouts and sword fights on television. But today's special effects and everyday settings give video violence a harder edge. The young viewer had little trouble separating the "Wild West" shown in '50s and '60s hits from his or her everyday life. Combining graphically portrayed violence with neighborhood settings such as supermarkets and shopping malls can be especially confusing to young children. Moreover, studies indicate that children are likelier to imitate violence that they believe is realistic.

5. Who sees more programs in which the heroes use violence to solve conflicts?

After a slight dip in the early '70s, bad guy bashing is back. Once again, leading characters solve conflicts by injuring, maiming or obliterating their opponents. Astonishingly, TV heroes kill twice as often as their antagonists do. One researcher quipped, "The bad guys usually hurt someone, and then the good guys kill them for it."

As one goes down the social pecking order, the price for getting involved in violence increases. Minority and foreign women, who are twice as likely to be hurt as to hurt others, pay the highest penalty.

6. Who is more likely to watch TV without an adult in the room?

With more and more two-career and single-parent families, TV's role as an electronic

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babysitter has increased. At the same time, more than half of all families owned more than one set by the late '80s, up from one in 10 in 1960. Many children therefore watch hours of programs without an adult present to help interpret characters' behavior or to counterbalance TV's distractions.

7. Who is more likely to play with toys based on characters seen on violent TV shows?

Davy Crockett coonskin caps, tomahawks and rifles would be buried in the onslaught of today's TV-related toys. Today's action figures and space invaders work hand in hand with advertising to sell violence. Thanks to this link — and to deregulation removing restrictions on violence and advertising — toy companies have become a powerful force in children's programming. At one point in the '80s, more than half of all children's shows were toy-based.

Unfortunately, this television and toy combination can become a learning laboratory for violence. Young children with little real-world experience use program-related toys to rehearse the aggressive behavior they have seen on TV.

8. Who knows more about the patterns of TV violence and its effects on children and adults?

In the early decades of television, we knew little about the effect of television violence on viewers. But that is no longer the case. No one claims that television violence is the only factor involved in the socialization of aggressive behavior. Nevertheless, hundreds of research studies over the past 20 years have demonstrated that children who watch a steady diet of violent programming increase their chances of becoming more aggressive with other children and adults, less willing to cooperate and share with other children and more afraid of the world outside their homes.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that "How can TV violence hurt my kid if it didn't hurt me?" is not the right question. Instead, parents should ask, "Why are my kids still watching so much TV violence when all this research has shown it's not good for them?"

Of all the questions about TV violence, that's the one that most deserves an answer.

Parker Paze is a social psychologist, founder and president of Children's Television Resource and Education Center, San Francisco.

Researcher Reviews Violence Concerns

By Nancy Signorielli

Content analysis — in this case tallying the acts of violence in network dramatic programs — is one job of researchers. But the totals have little meaning if we fail to question the consequences of immersion in television's violent world.

Concerns about the influence violence on television has on viewers focus on three areas:

- They will imitate the violent behaviors they see.
- Violent behavior will make them insensitive to personal violence as well as violence in society.
- Exposure to violence on television will help to shape and mold their values; that is, they will cultivate violence-related conceptions about the world.

In my view, the first two concerns have limited impact. There *have* been a few tragic instances in which individuals mimicked violent acts they see on television. But obviously, if television violence were constantly imitated, no one would be able to leave their homes; we would be reeling under the impact of violence.

There has also been some evidence, mostly in artificial laboratory settings, that viewers become callous and punitive after exposure to violent images. But again, this connection is neither clear nor sweeping.

My colleagues and I have found that violence on television plays a clear role in communicating the social order. Television's mean and dangerous world cultivates a sense of insecurity, vulnerability and mistrust — despite its supposedly "entertaining" nature.

Thus, my concerns about children watching violent programming would focus less on its role as a behavioral model and more on its role in helping to make children fearful, insecure and dependent upon authority.

If television encourages children to grow up demanding protection and even welcoming repression in the name of security, it creates more of a problem for our society than even acts of violence. This is the deeper problem of violence-laden television both for us and for our children. In my view it's worth worrying about.

Nancy Signorielli is an associate professor in the department of communication at the University of Delaware and one of the principal investigators of the Cultural Indicators Project located at the Annenberg School for Communication University of Pennsylvania.

Children imitate the world around them. As they see more violence, they playact more violence. If we do not care about their perception and response to violent behavior, how can we expect them to act more civilized, more reasonably and with more caring in an already too violent world?

Susan Wallace, M.D., *Lifestyle Magazine*

Access

Teach Kids to Make TV!

By John Merrow

In a documentary I produced some years ago called *Part Time Work*, 17-year-old Danny recognizes that he's wasted his high school years and faces a bleak future as "just another worker." After the documentary aired, however, Danny enrolled in college and majored in television production and theater.

In another documentary, Ricky is a high school dropout naively dreaming of a career in the National Basketball Association. But Ricky now has a high school diploma, is attending community college and hasn't played serious basketball for years.

I am not confessing to fraud and deception. The camera showed Ricky and Danny as we found them, but being around and on television changed their lives. And what happened to Danny and Ricky could easily happen — and should happen — to millions of American school children.

Why did television change Danny and Ricky? Was being with us merely a form of vocational education? Yes, but it was more. I think that making television gave Danny and Ricky some insight into and power over their own lives. My experience as a journalist and as a parent leads me to believe that a more helpful step than calling for more and better children's programming would be to invite children to be around, in and on television.

Children want desperately to be on television, as anyone who's taken a camera crew into a school can attest. Why do children jump, stare, turn cartwheels, wave and shout, "Hi, Mom"? I think that their moblike behavior is, paradoxically, a search for individuality. We seem to have become the polar opposite of those aborigines who fear that cameras will steal their souls. To children, being on TV proves that they exist, that they matter.

But educational institutions see children as empty vessels into which teachers pour knowledge, or as the raw material for their "knowledge factory." Children get the message that they're minor cogs in schooling's machine, and in ever-increasing numbers young people are rejecting that message by quitting school. Today one in four students drops out.

Can television, the greatest tool of mass communication ever developed, be a means of individualizing learning? Of course it can. Television is not only our neighbor, our common language, our link and the collector of our experiences. Used skillfully, it could be the instructional and motivational tool of the 1990s, the means of revitalizing our schools and of turning on our children in positive, life-enhancing ways. I'm saying, "Teach children–beginning in elementary school–to make TV." And as they learn to make television, they will also learn most of the other lessons, values and basic skills we want them to.

The possibilities are nearly endless, with basic equipment that can be purchased for under $5,000 (a minicam, tripod, two portable video/sound recorders, two color monitors and an editing unit). For example, junior high school social studies classes could make news programs about a particular historical period, with judges picking the winner. Or chemistry experiments could be videotaped and edited to teach both new material and lab techniques (as well as editing). Any imaginative teacher would find dozens of ways to have students use the equipment.

Years ago, a blue-ribbon panel recommended five sensible objectives for realizing the educational potential of television.

- **Availability.** Broadcast children's programs when they're watching television.
- **Diversity.** The range of content, style and subject matter should be as broad as a child's curiosity and needs.
- **Selectivity.** Television should not try to be everything but do what it does well.
- **Focus.** Make different programs for different age groups.
- **Innovation.** Take chances, experiment, explore new concepts.

I suggest a sixth objective:

- **Access.** Children ought to have access to information about how television is made and to the TV-making equipment itself. Access invites inquiry and encourages curiosity and creativity.

When I call it access I am really talking about making sure that young people have power over their own learning, with the guidance of trained professionals. All I am doing is recognizing ways in which TV is important, even central, to young people. It's time to recognize that television is also a wonderfully effective means of fostering cooperation and acknowledging children's individuality.

John Merrow is education correspondent for the MacNeil Lehrer Newshour on PBS. Excerpted with permission from Family Resource Coalition Report, *volume 9, number 1.*

Children's Express: Grown-ups' News, Kids' Views

By Kerry Gerot

Children's Express reporters provide kids-eye-view of politics and national affairs.

Children usually make the news only when they're victims of crime, abuse or involved in gangs. But Children's Express, a non-profit news service run by school-age journalists, is working not only to change the way children are covered but to involve them in the reporting as well.

The organization aims "to change the way children and teens see and value themselves and are seen and valued by others; to encourage reading, writing and understanding and to stimulate children's interest in the world."

But the children themselves say it even more clearly: "I never dreamed two years ago that I would be a reporter," said Robin Moulds, 11. "I was only a kid, you know, and now I feel that I can do it and I am capable." Nira Hyman, 15, adds: "The kids in my neighborhood aren't really into politics like they should be. And I wasn't really into politics until I started with Children's Express. It's important that kids really do start to understand what's going on in the world."

Now in its fifteenth year, Children's Express was established by publisher Robert H. Clampitt as a magazine produced by children for other children. It quickly evolved into a magazine and news service for everyone with its first big scoop (ahead of other media) Carter's choice of Mondale as running mate at the Democratic National Convention in 1976. Its young journalists were also recognized for distinguished public service for their coverage of the 1988 Presidential campaign at both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions.

Children's Express reporters are nine to 13 years old. They operate in teams of two to four and are identified by their bright yellow T-shirts. With tape recorders in hand, each team aggressively interviews its subjects with hard-hitting questions that are both predetermined and spontaneous. The interviews and the experiences are then discussed at a round-table gathering of the reporters, teenage editors and/or adult staff members. Then editors craft the words into a story with the reporters' input.

Children's Express reports run in feature or Op-Ed sections of newspapers and now appear weekly in such publications as: Chicago *Tribune*, Dallas *Times Herald*, Anchorage *Daily News*, among others, as well as its own *Children's Express Quarterly*.

Headquartered in New York City, Children's Express operates bureaus in Atlanta, Boston, Harlem, San Francisco, Australia, New Zealand and a new branch affiliated with the Children's Museum in Indianapolis. Clampitt says he hopes to expand soon to Washington, Cleveland and other interested cities.

The organization has not only helped to familiarize children with the process of making and disseminating the news but has involved them with the media in a positive and informative way by making them more aware of their own media usage. "I'm very picky now," said Jessica Trentlyon, 11. "I don't like to just watch anything. I usually try to turn on as much news as I can find. I just want to know what's going on."

"People don't realize that our kids, even at 10 or 12 years old, really prepare for their assignments," said Clampitt, a former Wall Street lawyer and now president of the Children's Express Foundation. Reporter Trentlyon elaborates: "We're really giving our whole viewpoint on the world and what we think of it for once. Not what grown-ups think of it — what we do. It's very important that we're finally having a chance to talk out and tell the world what kids really think."

> *"We're really giving our viewpoint on the world and what we think of it, for once."*
>
> **Children's Express reporter, Jessica Trentlyon, 11**

Story ideas are put forth by both editors and reporters and many times grow out of Children's Express conferences that are held to inform children about media and to educate media about children. For example, a recent feature on the poverty-striken Roxbury section of Boston grew out of a field trip a Children's Express team took while covering a conference of foundation executives. Other recent articles include an interview with a 12-year-old who talked about growing up as the daughter of an alcoholic; a roundtable discussion of racial awareness, attitudes and prejudice; and a short report on the status of education for blacks in South Africa.

Reporter Bip Selkirk, 12, summed up the organization best by writing: "Children's Express is about children understanding the world — and the world understanding children. We are trying to change the way children and teens see and value themselves — and how they are seen and valued by others. Children's Express — by children, for everyone."

Kerry Gerot is managing editor of Media&Values. *Contact Children's Express, 245 Seventh Avenue, Fifth Floor, New York, NY 10001-7302, (212)620-0098.*

Alternative Choices

Kidvideo: Choosing the Right Tape for Your Child

By Dennis Hunt

Walking into the children's section of a home-video store, facing shelves full of mostly unfamiliar titles, can be an unnerving experience for many parents. Which ones will the kids like? Is this one too sophisticated? Is that one too violent?

Here are some guidelines from two experts on children's video: Loretta MacAlpine, children's video writer for the trade journal *Video Insider*, and Nancy Steingard, vice president of acquisitions for HiTops Video, one of the industry's foremost kidvid companies.

1. Reviews. Reading reviews of new children's videos in women's and family magazines and in newspapers is one of the best ways to keep up with the flow of new product and to help form judgments. MacAlpine recommended *Family Circle*, *Redbook*, *Woman's Day*, *Parents Choice Magazine* and the New York-based *Children's Video Report*.

2. Word-of-mouth. "Parents should talk to other parents and find out what they've seen and watched," Steingard said. "Find out what they recommend. They can often tell you about content, and that will help you make judgements."

3. Outside sources. Often, teachers and video-store personnel are good sources, MacAlpine said. "Preschool teachers sometimes have seen a lot of videos," she added. "Check with video-store people and find ones that know the market and whose judgment you can trust."

4. Libraries. According to MacAlpine, some libraries have children's cassettes—often for free. Library personnel will probably have screened the titles and most likely can offer helpful guidance in making selections.

5. Video companies. The market is flooded with companies putting out kidvid titles. But there are a handful of companies whose track records suggest that you can be fairly certain of getting quality. Disney, MacAlpine said, is the company best known for first-rate kidvid. Others that usually put out high-quality product are HiTops, Celebrity, Hanna Barbera, Family Home Entertainment and Random House.

6. Awards. Some cassette packages bear stickers showing that the title has won an award. "If it's an award given by a recognized organization—one that you've heard of and respect—you might be more inclined to give that one a try," Steingard pointed out.

7. Synopses. The descriptions on the back of the video box can be helpful. "Don't just trust the pictures on the box," Steingard warned. "They can be flashy and misleading. Take time to read it with some skepticism, because some of what you'll read is just hype."

MacAlpine advises parents to be somewhat adventurous in their selections and to take advantage of the incredible variety in the kidvid market. Her number one rule is to avoid renting or buying what kids see on Saturday morning TV. "They can see that every week," she said. "Look for original programming, for what they can't see on TV."

"Helping kids to explore video rather than to absorb it is helping them develop necessary survival skills in an information society."

Barry Simpson, *Blinkity Blank*

Most kidvid titles are in the $10-$15 range. "When you see something that costs $3.99, who can resist it?" she said. "But unless you know about the title, you may get burned. There are a lot of fly-by-night companies out there exploiting the market. You may get it home and find that it's horrible quality."

What happens if you do make a poor judgment—if, in spite of all your precautions, you buy a cartoon for your three-year-old that's more suitable for a seven-year-old?

MacAlpine suggests screening whatever you buy before showing it to your kids. "Particularly with small children, take the time to check tapes out first to make sure they're not too sophisticated and violent for them," she said, noting that the recommended age ranges listed on the cassette shouldn't be regarded as gospel. Maybe there's something that's perfectly fine for an eight-year-old but not for your three-year-old.

"You may say you don't have time, but aren't your kids worth that extra time?"

Dennis Hunt is a staff writer for the Los Angeles Times. *Copyright, 1990,* Los Angeles Times. *Reprinted by permission.*

Returning Power to Parents: TV Locking Devices

Most experts recommend monitoring — and limiting — children's TV use. But a growing supply of television locking devices attest to the fact that some children find it hard to keep their favorite shows, Nintendo games and video cassettes off the screen.

Key-operated electronic devices are offered at different prices by various companies, and comparison shopping is advised. But they all promise to help parents regain control of their children's television sets, Nintendo games and VCRs.

A last resort for most families, the gadgets are best used to help children learn that homework and chores must be finished and that playtime needn't be electronic. But their most effective role is helping kids learn to make their own media choices.

Some available options:

- **Perfectly Safe (video cassette lock device), Customer Service Department, 7245 Whipple NW, North Canton, OH 44720; (800)837-KIDS, $12.95/VHS + shipping.**
- **The Switch, AJ Marketing Inc., 267 Walker Ave., Clarendon Hills, IL 60514; (800)535-5845, $19.95 + shipping, quantity price varies.**
- **Homework First/Safe Care Products (Nintendo lock device), 203 N. Edward St., Cassopolis, MI 49031; (800)235-6646, ext. 480, $15.95 + shipping.**

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CAN I BE EXCUSED? THERE'S A TV SHOW I WANT TO SEE.
WE'RE STILL EATING DINNER, CALVIN.
I'M THROUGH THIS STUFF WAS AWFUL. I WANT TO GO WATCH TELEVISION.
IT'S IMPOLITE TO LEAVE THE TABLE IN THE MIDDLE OF A MEAL.
SO WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO? JUST SIT HERE AND WATCH YOU GUYS CHEW?! I'LL MISS MY SHOW!
YOUR TV SHOW ISN'T AS IMPORTANT AS SPENDING SOME TIME TOGETHER AS A FAMILY.
WE'LL COMPROMISE. I'LL GO WATCH A SITCOM FAMILY.
IN A MINUTE YOU'RE GOING TO DISCOVER THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THOSE AND REAL LIFE.

Bridge the Gap: Sharing Your Family's Life Stories

By Hal Bogotch

Picture your most recent family get-together. Dinner, TV, maybe an argument over what to watch?

How about an evening where "the tube" stays black and your family is the star!

Maybe you're a grandparent with lots of stories you'd love to pass on to your grandchildren — terrific! But what about little Lucy and Billy who are only six or seven — can they join in, too? Sure. As a matter of fact, they may have an edge; this technique involves writing from a child's point of view.

Hiring a director and film crew isn't required. You just need storytelling skills. Instead of a film, the end product will be a story or series of stories written down and then shared to become part of your family's permanent collective memory.

How do you begin? First, recall an incident from your early childhood. If several come to mind, jot them down then select one to start with. Got one? Good! Now take a few moments to "replay" the event in your head. See the place, hear the sounds, smell the smells just as they were. Let yourself go.

Next, write down the "scene" from beginning to end. Let it flow! Resist the urge to edit or censor yourself. The idea is to get it all out — don't worry about grammar or sentence structure.

The next step — gulp, swallow — is rewriting. A diamond doesn't come out of the ground cut and polished; it must be worked and reworked. Same with your story. Pay attention to a few key elements:

• Stay in the first person. Using "I" keeps your story alive.

• Be sure to include your feelings and emotions. Give it some juice.

• Show what you see, tell what you hear. Make it vivid!

Finally, it's time to share the story with your family. Dinner's over, everyone is seated comfortably. Read your story aloud. How does it feel? Exciting! Don't be surprised if other members of your family bring their own stories next time. It can be contagious. Through these sessions, you may find you are becoming closer as a family. And that's more than you can say for watching reruns of *The Brady Bunch*.

If your appetite is whetted for a more in-depth treatment of this topic, I highly recommend the following book:

Writing From Within, by Bernard Selling. Hunter House Inc., P.O. Box 847, Claremont, CA 91711, $9.95.

Hal Bogotch is a free-lance writer in Los Angeles and a Media&Values *volunteer.*

Re:Action

TV Stereotyping Reviewed

By Gordon Berry

I'm always surprised to hear critics complain that *The Cosby Show*'s Huxtables have an unrealistic lifestyle. There are many African-American families whose behavior patterns are very similar. Could the critics be stereotyping?

As an African-American educator and communications professional, however, I'm naturally concerned about the long-term effects of misleading portrayals of minority groups on the African-American, Asian, Latino and Native American children who watch them. I am also concerned about the misleading cultural assumptions that non-minority children acquire from television.

Today, children's self images are not formed exclusively by the family. The vast multimedia organizations that tell our stories and convey our news play a major role in determining how children think and feel about themselves.

When used properly, however, television can be a great cross-cultural communicator for both minority and majority children. As a parent or teacher:

• Take nothing for granted. Make sure children understand that when creative license is taken for entertainment purposes, stereotypes can creep in.

• Provide a range of multicultural materials and activities — from books to videos — in the home as the best supplement to television portraits.

• Serve as a model of selective viewing. When watching with your children, don't fail to challenge stereotyped and misleading portraits.

For a brochure offering *10 Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Racism and Sexism*, send $4.45 to Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1841 Broadway, New York, NY 10023; package of 10 only.

Gordon Berry is a professor of counseling and educational psychology at the University of California Los Angeles. He is the co-editor, with Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, of Television and the Socialization of the Minority Child.

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Realism

Dealing with Death: How Children's Television Doesn't

By Linda K. Fuller

The Cosby Show was one of the few television programs to deal seriously with the topic of death from a child's perspective.

By the age of five, the typical child television viewer in the United States will have logged more than 200 hours of violent images. The average 14-year-old has witnessed the killing of 13,000 human beings. By age 18, that number has escalated to 18,000.

Yet with rare exceptions, none of these television deaths involves a funeral or a view of the grieving family and friends.

An absorbing TV story can teach young viewers that the sorrow, pain, powerlessness and anger caused by death are perfectly legitimate emotions.

Like their prime-time counterparts, cartoons and dramas for children are far better at depicting violence — murders, blown-up cars, falls from high buildings — than the pain and loss of the deaths they cause.

Often, characters who are pronounced dead on one episode will reappear saying they hadn't really died at all — that they were kidnapped, hospitalized or had plastic surgery to change their looks. Or maybe it was all just a bad dream.

Such denials of reality are not accidental, according to George Gerbner of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Gerbner believes that mass media portayals become cultural symbols of avoidance, helping to conceal death's finality. Thus, death is portrayed as a punishment for some flaw in character or status, not a natural and inevitable part of life.

Sometimes, however, television rises above its general attempt to pretend death comes only to those who deserve it.

Ode To a Fish

Maybe fish are easier to deal with than dogs and cats, but the death of pets can lower emotions to a child's framework. Both the longterm outstanding public television children's show *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* and an early episode of *The Cosby Show* based sensitive episodes on the deaths of pet fish.

Mr. Rogers' serious treatment of the loss of his fish helps young viewers learn, as he says, that "It's OK to be sad when someone you love dies." A bathroom funeral that drew the whole Huxtable family into mourning for "Mr. Fish" was riotously funny to the audience. But it stands out as probably the only example of prime-time television when the loss of a child's pet was given full attention and commiseration.

When Will Lee, the actor who played *Sesame Street's* friendly neighborhood grocer, Mr. Hooper, died of a heart attack, the show's producers had to decide whether or not to simply write him out of the script. Instead, they carefully planned an episode that would explain his death, scheduling it for airing on Thanksgiving Day, 1983, in hopes that parents would be watching it with their children. In a carefully crafted scenario, Big Bird has to learn that "When people die, they don't come back."

Sorrow, anger, numbness, guilt, powerlessness and/or fear are all common reactions to death, for children as well as adults. Children also need to be consoled for their grief over missing the deceased — or for wondering if they themselves would be missed or simply forgotten or replaced.

As these episodes show, an absorbing story can still teach viewers that the sorrow, pain, powerlessness and anger caused by death are perfectly legitimate emotions. The more television seeks to deny death's reality by consigning it to meaningless shoot-em-ups, the more that lesson becomes something that children need to learn.

Linda K. Fuller is an associate professor in the media department of Worcester State College, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Re:Action

Guides to Quality

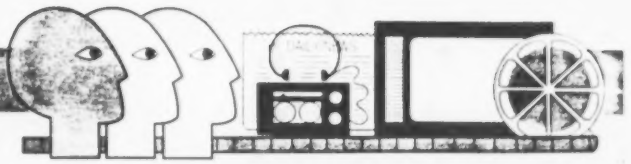
The issue of quality children's entertainment has some parents turning off the television set and others taking away books and magazines. Videos are one alternative to commercial television, but knowing what video to choose or what reading material to provide isn't easy. Here are some resources that will help parents find quality reading and viewing for their children.

• **The Family Guide to Movies on Video**, edited by Henry Herx, evaluates many movies released in the U.S. between 1966 and 1987 for family entertainment (1988). Crossroad Publishing Co., 370 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, (800)331-3761, $12.95.

• **Guide to Video Cassettes for Children**. Diana Green reviews films on video providing appropriate age ranges, as well as related books (1989). Parents' Choice Foundation, P.O. Box 185, Newton, MA, 02168, (617)965-5913, $14.

• **Magazines for Children**, edited by Donald R. Stoll, describes the content of more than a hundred publications for children (1990). International Reading Society, 800 Barksdale Road, P.O. 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139, (302)731-1600, $5.25.

—Beth White



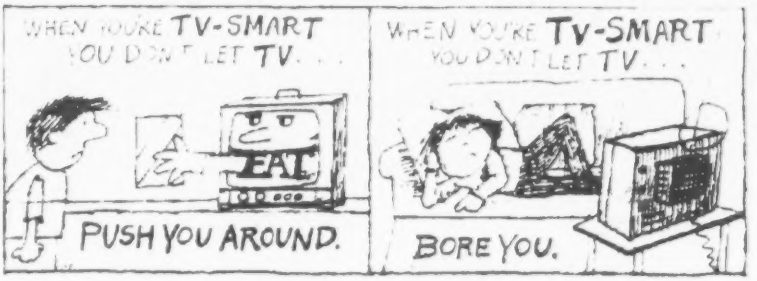
TUBE TURN-ONS

HOW TO BE A SMART TV WATCHER:
A Special Pull-out Page for Kids!

By Ellen B. De Franco

Do your parents bug you about the TV you watch? Do they question *how much* TV you watch? Here are some things you can try to become a smarter TV user. In fact, when you start doing these Turn-Ons, maybe you can teach your parents some things about TV!

Usually the more you know about something, the more you like it. Just think how confused you would be if you tried playing soccer or hopscotch without knowing the rules. The same thing is true of TV: the more you learn about it, the more fun it can be.



TV Turn-On #1: Put TV Under a Microscope

Examine as you watch. Use construction paper to make two-inch-square reaction cards to select during a program and then use as reminders afterwards to talk about what you have seen. Below are some suggested reaction messages. Add more of your own ideas:

Fun
Adventuresome
Nicer to males than females
Too many killings
Few people of different races
Only half-true
Lots of put-downs
Can't be done
Exciting
Too scary
Clever
Silly
Pleasant
Not fair
Not funny

TV Turn-On #2: Be Your Own TV Doctor

This one's a lot like putting TV under a microscope, but instead you put yourself under a stethoscope by deciding how you feel as you watch TV. Make mood cards to use during and after each program. Stack these cards each day, and at the end of a week count the numbers in each category. Talk about your moods with your family. Use construction paper to make two-inch-square cards with moods on them like:

bored
happy
annoyed
excited
scared
sad
grumpy
laughing
mad
inspired

YOU MAY FREELY COPY THESE TWO PAGES FOR DISCUSSION OR GROUP ACTIVITY.

TUBE-TURN-ONS

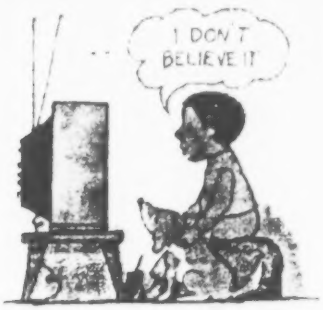
TV Turn-On #3: Use TV as a People Encyclopedia

Watch programs for examples of the many different ways people have of doing things and getting along together. Talk about what you find out with your family and friends. Here are some categories to study:

Families	*Owning things*	*Schools*	
Friendship	*Favorite people*	*Sex roles*	*Prejudice*
Groups	*Discipline*	*Fads*	*Different kinds of work*
Cooperation	*Responsibility*	*Commercials*	*Care of the environment*

TV Turn-On #4: Become a TV Commercial Detective — Spot the gimmicks!

Understand the BIG BUSINESS side of TV. Sponsors pay a lot of money to advertise their products before, during and after programs to make people want to buy them. Watch and look for some of the tricks used to help sell products. Copy the following list onto a piece of paper and put check marks next to these tricks when you see them:



Things look bigger, better or tastier than they really are.
Backgrounds or settings are usually beautiful or glamorous.
Music and sound effects add to the attraction of products.
Scenes are very romantic or funny.
When prices of products are mentioned, they do not always include necessary additional costs, such as batteries.
The name or logo of a product is repeated over and over so people will be sure to remember it.
Things appear to be able to do more than they really can.
The real things often aren't as good as they appear in commercials.

TV Turn-On #5: Be picky and choosy about the TV you watch.

Once you've started to do some of the other TV Turn-Ons, you'll want to start thinking about which shows you really like, and which shows you really don't like. Think carefully about the programs you watch. Give them your honest rating.

C = can't be missed S = so-so W = waste of time

Stop watching "W" and "S" rated programs. Find something else to do instead. Make a chart to keep track of your ratings.

Ellen B. DeFranco is a free-lance columnist and author of the soon-to-be published book Your Children and TV.

Art adapted with permission from The TV Smart Book for Kids *by Peggy Charren and Carol Hulsizer, illustrated by Marilyn Hafner (1986). E.P. Dutton, 2 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016, (800)526-0275, $6.95.*

©1990 Center for Media and Values. These activities may be freely copied in any quantity for discussion or educational purposes only. If you wish, send comments to *Media&Values*. It will help us learn more about how you and your family are living creatively with the media.

Media&Values is a project of the Center for Media and Values, a non-profit educational organization to promote thoughtful awareness and better use of television and mass media. Membership is $30/year and includes *Media&Values* magazine. Additional contributions are tax-deductible.

Center for Media and Values, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034 • (213) 559-2944

WATCH, READ, LISTEN

Resources for Follow-up

IN PRINT

• ***The TV Smart Book for Kids,*** by Peggy Charren and Carol Hulsizer, is a calendar from Action for Children's Television with questions and activities designed for children and parents to use together. E.P. Dutton, 2 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016; (800)526-0275, $6.95.

• ***Children and Television: A Challenge for Education,*** edited by Michael E. Manley-Casimir and Carmen Luke, is a collection of papers dealing with television's role in child development and teaching media literacy (1987). Greenwood Press (Praeger), 88 Post Road West, P.O. Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881; (203)226-3571, $45.

• ***Mind and Media: The Effects of Television, Video Games, and Computers,*** by Patricia Marks Greenfield, explores how various media can be used to help children develop intellectually and socially (1984). Harvard University Press, 79 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138-9983; (617)495-2480, $14.50.

• ***Parents Talking Television: Television in the Home*** collects essays concerning the benefits of television's role in family relationships, edited by Philip Simpson (1987). Comedia Publishing Group, (Routledge, Chapman & Hall Inc.) 29 West 35th St., New York, NY 10001-2291; (212)244-3336, $10.95.

• ***Taking Advantage of Media: A Manual for Parents and Teachers*** by Laurene Krasny Brown looks at the benefits and shortcomings of radio, television, film, books and computers for toddlers to adolescents offering questions and activities to involve children in media (1986). Routledge and Kegan Paul, 29 West 35th St., New York, NY 10001; (212)244-6412, $19.95.

• ***Television and America's Children: A Crisis of Neglect,*** by Edward Palmer points out the untapped educational potential of television and compares international children's programming with the U.S. (1988). Oxford University Press Inc., 2001 Evans Rd., Cary, NC 27513; (919)677-0977, $7.95.

• ***Television and Children*** examines children's interactions with television, emphasizing the child's active role in making sense of the medium by Aimee Dorr (1986). Sage Publications Inc., P.O. Box 5084, Newbury Park, CA 91359; (805)499-0721, $9.95.

• ***TV Interactive Toys: The New High Tech Threat to Children,*** by Pamela Tuchscherer, discusses the problem of violent interactive toys teaching children antisocial behavior (1988). Pinnaroo Publishing, P.O. Box 7525, Bend, OR 97708; (503)947-5002, $9.95.

• ***Video Violence and Children*** is a compilation of survey and report findings from psychiatrists, pediatricians, educators, and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, by Geoffrey Barlow and Alison Hill, (1985). St. Martin's Press Inc., Publishers' Book Mailing Service, P.O. Box 120159, Staten Island, NY 10312; (718)667-6483, $19.95.

• ***World Families Watch Television,*** edited by James Lull, creates a forum for critical questioning of the family's roles in television viewing (1988). Sage Publications Inc., P.O. Box 5084, Newbury Park, CA 91359; (805)499-0721, $16.95.

• ***Who Touched the Remote Control?*** by Mary Duckert, contains activity pages, stories, and a teacher's guide designed to link media with children's religious faith (1990). Friendship Press, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 772, New York, NY 10115; (212)870-2586, $9.95.

• ***Are They Selling Her Lips?,*** by psychologist Carol Moog, exposes the psychological games advertisers play with an excellent chapter on children (1990). William Morrow and Company Inc., 105 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016; (800)843-9389, $18.95.

And More Resources!

Other organizations and additional books and resources are listed with specific articles throughout this issue.

SIGHT/SOUND

• **"Children and Television"** features Bob Keeshan (Captain Kangaroo) detailing the effects of television on children and offers suggestions for parents to make television a positive tool (1986), 21 minutes. Cokesbury, 201 8th Ave., Nashville, TN 37202, $24.95.**

• **"Who is Sylvia?"** a dramatization of the harmful effects of using television as a babysitter and how children benefit by having a parent watch with them (1980), 29 minutes. National AudioVisual Center, 8700 Edgeworth Dr., Capital Heights, MD 20743, $110.**

** The above films are available for rental through Media Center, 472 E. Colorado Blvd., P.O. Box 6006, Pasadena, CA 91102; (800)748-5855, $15.

• **"Buy Me That!"** produced by HBO, Action for Children's Television and *Consumer Reports*, teaches children how to be critical viewers of commercials and shows tricks used to make the products look better (1989), 28 minutes. Films Inc., 5547 N. Ravenswood Ave., Chicago, IL 60640-1199; (312)878-2600, $79.

ORGANIZATIONS

• **Parents' Choice** publishes a quarterly newspaper that reviews television programs, videos, books, cassettes, computer programs, games, movies, toys and rock music suitable for use by families and children. P.O. Box 185, Newton, MA 02168; (617)965-5913.

• **Kidsnet,** a non-profit computerized clearinghouse for children's television and radio to help increase awareness of the educational potential of electronic media and to improve children's programming. P.O. Box 65089, Washington, DC 20035; (202)291-1400.

• **Kidvidz** produces award-winning, special interest videos for children complete with activity guides for follow up after viewing, 618 Centre St., Newton, MA 02158; (617)965-3345.

MEDIA LITERACY
Agenda for the '90s

By Elizabeth Thoman
Executive Director

We live in a media environment. Hardly a minute goes by that any one of us is not inundated by entertainment or commercial messages from television, radio, newspapers and magazines, billboards and bumper stickers... even T-shirts.

While we all recognize the many benefits to society resulting from today's instant global communications, we are also aware of the challenges it has brought to parental authority, to family relationships and especially to the established value structure that was installed for centuries by the home working in tandem with the school and the church or synagogue.

But those days are gone. And the challenge for families, schools and all community institutions today is to prepare young people for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds.

Throughout this issue, various authors have called for programs of *media education* to help kids (and adults) learn more positive ways of interacting with the media in their lives.

Many people are surprised to learn that media education (or media literacy) is an established part of the educational system in Europe and in other English-speaking countries, including Canada, Australia, Scotland and England.

But in the U.S., which exports most of the world's media from "Rambo" movies to music videos, there has been very little media education activity inside or outside American schools. There have been no national policy conferences on the topic and what little has taken place has been developed piecemeal by local coalitions or dedicated individual teachers.

The United States needs leadership and direction to catch up with the rest of the world in this increasingly important educational arena.

Our challenge... is to prepare young people for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds.

This is the mission of the Center for Media and Values. Our purpose is to create:

- *a new way of thinking* about the influence and impact of mass media in our time.
- *new curriculum resources* for educating adults and young people to become more knowledgeable and selective media users.
- *a vision and a practical program* for media literacy in the 1990s.

Even as we finish this provocative issue on *Children and Television: Growing Up in a Media World*, we are also finalizing a new approach to media education that can be used in your school or PTA group, your church or synagogue, your parenting group or adult continuing education class.

From Awareness to Action: Media Literacy in the '90s explains the Center's strategy and vision for media literacy, introduces Media and Values Workshop Kits designed for adult or youth groups and includes tips for making a program successful from the start. Send for a copy — it's free!

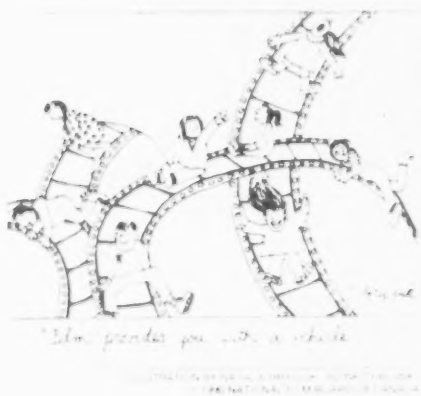
And if you are not already a member of the Center for Media and Values, I urge you to join today.

- Learn more about how media influence you every day!
- Discover ways to use TV and video to enrich your life and expand your children's horizons.
- Receive help and resources for media education at home or for a class or group.
- Help create a strong national network for media literacy in the '90s!

It may be the most important thing you do for your kids this year.

• • •

Single copies of ***From Awareness to Action: Media Literacy in the '90s*** are available at no charge. But please send two first-class stamps to help cover the postage. Write or call: Center for Media and Values, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034, (213)559-2944.



CO-SPONSORS

Thanks to the following organizations whose generous contributions funded the development of this special issue on children and television:

- Fieldstead & Company
- The Lawrence Welk Foundation
- Women's and Family Program General Board of Global Ministries United Methodist Church
- William T. Grant Foundation
- Foundation for Child Development
- United Church of Canada — Division of Communications

Back issues with future ideas about current trends

Some say that ***Media&Values*** *is ahead of its time, which means that these back issues offer you the information you need just in time to keep on top of the dynamic media age in which we live. Perhaps most helpful of all, each issue contains several unique features that make it ideal for use in classrooms, discussion groups, conferences, youth programs, parenting classes and more. As the leading resource for media awareness education,* ***Media&Values*** *is an invaluable reference and tool for teachers, for leaders, for everyone concerned about the media today.*

Build your library of issues on the issues. Order today!

Price List Per Title

1 copy	$4 each	*Pay in advance and save money! No charge for shipping when you enclose payment or charge to your credit card!*
2–49 copies	$3 each	
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	42	Home Video: The Revolution is Choice		
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	44	Elections: Image or Issues?		
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	46	The Birds, the Bees and Broadcasting: What the Media Teaches Our Kids About Sex		
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Now from the publishers of ***Media&Values****:*

Parenting in a TV Age

- *The first ready-to-use workshop kit designed for parent programs, teacher/parent associations, church/synagogue groups, classes and conferences.*
- *Contains leader's guide, handout masters, background resources plus an engaging process for one to four 80-90 minute sessions on one of the most challenging concerns facing families today: television.*

From Saturday morning cartoons to Nintendo, advertising and movies, parents worry about media's impact on their children. Are their fears justified? How much can parents and teachers influence children's media use? How did children become a consumer market? What should you know as a parent (or grandparent) about our exploding media environment? What practical — and positive — things can you do to make a difference?

Expanding on this special double-issue of Media&Values *on children and television,* **Parenting in a TV Age** *provides a step-by-step group process to help you explore and identify:*

- *How TV is changing parenting styles*
- *Five basic things your children should know about TV*
- *How commercials target the child market*
- *How to set standards for violence and other questionable content*
- *Strategies for managing TV, video, Nintendo in your family.*

Order today! *Only $17.95.**
Send payment with order to address above or call: 213/559-2944; Visa and MasterCard accepted.

** Or receive the kit free with your organizational membership in the Center for Media and Values. $75/year. Membership card and details inside.*

"...examines issues of importance for parents, educators and everyone concerned about children today."

David Kleeman,
American Children's Television Festival

"...a thoughtful contribution to grassroots education... Use it!"

Peggy Charron,
Action for Children's Television

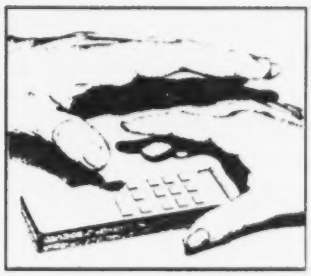
S1

· From Awareness to Action:

Media Literacy for the 90's

Introducing a new approach to media literacy education using Media and Values Workshop Kits.

By Jay F. Davis
Educational Services Coordinator
Center for Media and Values



"If audiences begin to choose their media less automatically and more intentionally, those cumulative acts of choice will ultimately change the nature of our media environment."

— Elizabeth Thoman

Media&Values is more than just a magazine. It's a tool, a catalyst, for leading you — or helping you lead others — from awareness to action on the many issues raised by today's mass media and new communications technologies.

Whether you're a teacher, counselor, community organizer, youth worker, religious leader, or just an active media watcher of any age, the ideas and activities in the enclosed workshop kit can help you examine your media environment and begin to challenge and change it.

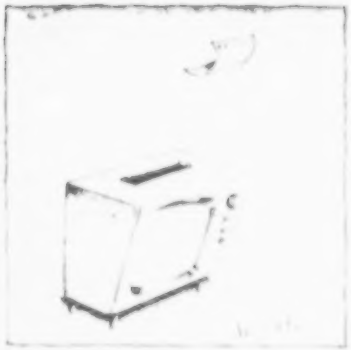
Still, there are no quick-fix solutions to issues like sexual violence in the media, bias in the news or advertising directed to children. Media and Values Workshop Kits provide a place to begin. Each kit is a ready-to-go resource for bringing these and other issues to your group — not just by showing a film or watching a video, but by examining the underlying messages, assumptions, and worldview of mass media.

Most importantly, Media and Values Workshops are designed to *empower* media users. After participating in a Media and Values Workshop program, participants will do things like:

- Talk to children, friends and colleagues about the media and its social and political influence.
- No longer just turn on the TV or a video game; rather, they will deliberately choose media experiences to which they want to be exposed.
- Seek out alternative sources for news and information.
- Talk back to the television.
- Identify common techniques used by advertisers to convince them to buy products, thus becoming less responsive to those techniques.
- Support smaller, local media outlets (newspapers and magazines, cable channels, radio, etc.).
- Create media experiences (videotapes, audio tapes, newsletters) that express their own viewpoints.
- Identify needs the mass media fill in their own lives so that they begin to pick and use the media to meet those needs more effectively.
- Write letters to advertisers, TV stations, radio deejays, sitcom producers.
- Question the role advertising plays in fueling the consumer lifestyle, perhaps beginning to consume less and thus live more responsibly.

Of course, all these will not happen overnight. These are instead the kinds of activities Media and Values Workshop sessions are designed to elicit over many years. Media education is a lifelong process.

A project of CENTER FOR MEDIA AND VALUES, 1962 S. Shenandoah St., Los Angeles, CA 90034



"Media education is both esential to the exercising of our democratic rights and a necessary safeguard against the worst excesses of media manipulation for political purposes."

— Len Masterman

Why Study the Media?

In *Teaching the Media*, Len Masterman lists seven reasons that media literacy education is important:

1. ***Media saturation.*** Television is not the only mass medium that accounts for media saturation. When one considers pop music, radio, newspapers, magazines, computers and video games — in addition to TV — we are exposed to more mass media messages in one day than our grandparents were exposed to in a month.

2. ***Media influence.*** The media sell "audience consciousness." The media are deliberately trying to predispose people to buy not just certain detergents, cars and aspirin, but to *buy*.

3. ***The manufacture and management of information.*** Most governments and businesses have "PR" departments (whether they call them that or not), whose purpose is to get "good news" about them into public consciousness. Many are succeeding to an unguessed degree. Much of what is reported as "news," in fact, comes directly from PR departments and press releases.

4. ***Media education and democracy.*** Political leaders have discovered the influence of the media. Those who use the media well get their way regardless of public policy or personal integrity.

5. ***The increasing importance of visual communication and information.*** For hundreds of years, society has valued reading and understanding the meaning of texts. Yet in today's society, visual image is arguably more important than the printed word. There has been no corresponding focus on reading the meaning of visual images.

6. ***The growing privatization of information.*** The world economy is fast becoming an information economy. Information is a commodity to be bought and sold. A danger exists that new classes of "information-rich" and "information-poor" may result, with the information-poor unable to afford the information they need to better their lives.

7. ***Educating for the future.*** The above issues will not decline in importance. Tomorrow's world, in fact, will be increasingly dominated by mass media and communications technologies. Generations of the future will need to understand how the mass media influence society.

Settings for Media and Values Workshops

Media and Values Workshops are designed for adults and older teens. They can be used in a variety of group settings:

- by parenting groups who want to learn media literacy skills in order to pass them on to their children, the leaders of the future.
- by educators and counselors in secondary school classrooms.
- by religious leaders of all faiths who recognize the responsibility of helping young people (and adults) live a life of virtue and value in the midst of a mass media society.
- by a creative leader who can adapt Media and Values Workshops for use with a scout troop, youth club, or youth service group.
- by women's or men's organizations, including senior citizen groups, that provide continuing education or enrichment programs for their members.
- on retreats dealing specifically or in part with the impact of media in our lives — addressing issues like how the media impact our under-standing of our sexual selves, how to read through the bias in the news, or the role of the media in saving (or destroying) the environment.
- even by two people over the breakfast table.

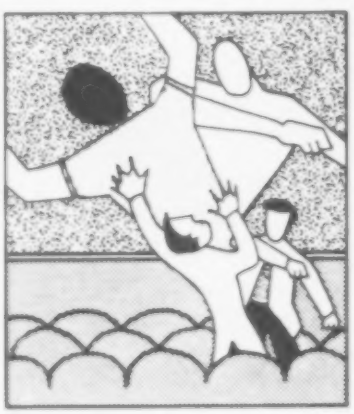
What Is Media Literacy Education?

The definition of media literacy education changed significantly during the 1980's. This change can be described as a movement from media education as *discrimination* to media education as *empowerment*.

In the 1970's, in fact, media education was usually conceptualized as a way of helping learners *discriminate* between "good" and "bad" movies and television shows. In this view, still used often today, individuals are taught to appreciate "good" media as they would good art, so that media education means something like art appreciation. A variation of this view tries to determine the moral impact of media, so that "good" television and films are those that encourage "good" moral values.

These aesthetic and moral concerns are important, of course, but in the 1980's media users worldwide began to look closely at the political and economic systems in which Western media have flourished. For the first time, the idea that the media have political, social and economic impact beyond questions of moral or aesthetic content began to be taken seriously. Rather than "What behavior (or attitudes or values) does this television show exhibit?" the questions became "*Who in society benefits* from the sexism in the media?" and "*What are the political implications* of violence on television?"

There is a sense of powerlessness when one confronts the mass media. We want to change that.



This new approach empowers media users because it acknowledges the listener-viewer's role in determining the impact of media. Rather than demand that the mass media itself protect us from allegedly "immoral" or "undemocratic" influences, this approach suggests that by understanding the political, social and economic influence of the media, media users can gain the power to change the mass media themselves by changing the way they respond to it and interact with it. This kind of empowerment is the essence of democracy. There are at least five principles of this empowerment view of media study:

1. ***Audiences negotiate meaning.*** Audiences are not simply "sitting ducks" soaking in everything that they see, read and hear. Personal experiences and conscious choices play roles in determining the effect of any media experience on a person.

2. ***Media construct reality.*** Television, for example, is not a window on the real world. It is a *construction* created by photographers, writers, and editors to communicate specific messages and images.

3. ***Media present ideologies and value messages.*** All media are created with specific ideologies and value messages. The furniture and furnishings of the Huxtable household in *The Cosby Show*, for example, idealize a version of upper middle-class lifestyle.

4. ***Media use identifiable techniques.*** Advertisers, for example, know how to stimulate desired reactions in audiences. Common techniques include "canting" — tilting a woman's head to make her look seductive, or having men grasp objects tightly, making them appear more virile.

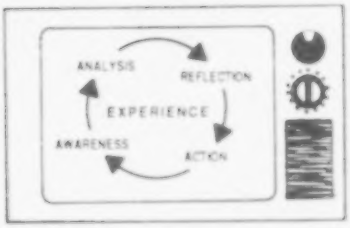
5. ***Media are businesses with commercial interests.*** Their primary purpose is not to entertain or inform, but to make money. This means that the media must create an environment compatible to advertising messages. Even editorial content and news must work to insure not just the largest audience, but the largest audience with "disposable" income.

How Does One Teach Media Literacy?

A new approach is required when teaching media literacy. Because students of all ages often know more than the teacher or leader about topics such as rock music, advertising or sex on television, the best learning happens when leaders recognize "teachable moments," capitalizing on participants' own knowledge and interests. Teachers and group leaders should see themselves as "learning facilitators" rather than funnels who siphon facts and knowledge into hinged heads. Teachers may in fact learn more than students.

"Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students."

— Paulo Freire



You do not even have to watch a lot of television or be familiar with classic movies to conduct a Media and Values Workshop. An inquiring mind, an enthusiasm for life and a respect for other people's feelings, beliefs and experiences are the best requirements for being a leader.

Media and Values Workshops use a four-step method of Awareness—Analysis—Reflection—Action that emphasizes this co-learning model:

- ***Awareness*** is the exploration step. Participants explore a theme, discovering points of tension between personal values and media. A parent group studying video violence might compare notes on the various ways their children of different ages respond to different types of violent images.
- ***Analysis*** is the process of searching for political, economic, social, cultural and personal context in which to think about the theme. Participants might read an article that explains how advertising segments the public into audience "targets," watch a video that documents how the nightly news is gathered and edited or look for patterns in the way males and females are depicted in magazine ads.
- ***Reflection*** addresses the question "So what?" The goal is identification of what's right or wrong in light of one's personal values, imagining what ought to be. Participants might become headline editors, rewriting headlines to reflect the point of view of women or minorities rather than the typical white or male perspective.
- ***Action*** is something done as a result of the first three steps. This may range from simply learning to "talk back" while watching television to becoming involved in a citizen review of a local cable channel.

This process is important and defines generally how Media and Values Workshops flow, yet the process itself is not as important as allowing the group to define content and direction. Ideally, Media and Values Workshops motivate participants to take what they learn and apply it to all their media experiences. Participants are not likely to care about or feel capable of applying their learning to "everyday life" if they feel media study is boring, irrelevant or depends completely on the leader's knowledge.

Thus, it is essential to address the ideas, concerns and interests of participants. But don't avoid economic, political, cultural and historical analysis because it seems "heavy" for your group. These are precisely the issues that need to be addressed in order to empower participants.

Media&Values Magazine

A key resource in the Awareness—Analysis—Reflection—Action process is *Media&Values* magazine. Each issue of the magazine explores a specific topic related to the mass media, such as *Media and Money: How the Bottom Line Affects What We See and Read*, or *Children and Television: Growing up in a Media World*.

Media and Values Workshops are built on the theme of one or several issues of *Media&Values*. A copy of the relevant issue is included with each kit. Purchasing additional copies for each participant is optional but not necessary.

The magazine follows the same process as the workshop process. Each issue begins with a series of articles which first raise awareness about the importance of the topic, followed by articles which analyze the topic from sociological, political, cultural, economic and historical perspectives.

Regular columnists reflect on value questions, and a special "Reflection Resource" is always included to help facilitate this reflection in group settings. Finally, interspersed throughout the magazine are "Re:Action" boxes and how-to articles which suggest action steps to take personally, locally or nationally.

In practice, of course, the four steps are much more fluid than this description suggests. The process is, in fact, one of continual new awareness leading to new action which leads again to newer and deeper awareness. Awareness, Analysis, Reflection and Action weave in and out of each other like Navajo cloth.

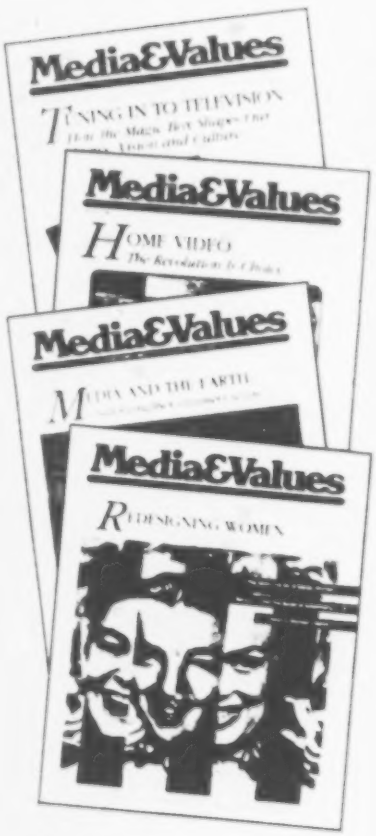
Contents of Media and Values Workshop Kits

Your Media and Values Workshop Kit contains three sections:

1. The Leader's Guide, with an introduction to the workshop sessions, and four-page step-by-step plans for leading each session.
2. Quality originals to produce handouts for workshop sessions.
3. Supplementary Resources, like:
   - *Media &Values* magazine(s) for leader preparation and background reading.
   - License to reprint *original* information from *Media&Values* for use in newsletters and workshop announcements. This includes permission to reprint the handouts in quantity.
   - Recommended audio-visual resources and how to order them (In the future, the Center for Media and Values plans to create and produce videos related to each workshop issue).
   - Suggestions (including a reproducible form) for evaluation of workshop sessions.

Each workshop session is designed as a self-contained 60-90 minute interactive process (though your group's choices may make sessions longer or shorter). Two or more sessions may be combined by skipping the closing activity of the first session(s), and continuing with the next session. You may want to combine aspects of two closings into one final closing for combined sessions.

Leaders who wish to compress sessions into less than one hour will have to determine whether to leave out an activity, or reduce the amount of time spent on activities. In any case, for shorter sessions it is important that leaders monitor time carefully.



"Media&Values may be the most useful tool available for sorting out the media messages, ideas and values that swirl around us each day."

— Utne Reader

Tips and Suggestions for Leading Effective Group Sessions on Media Themes and Topics.

A few strategies can set the stage for effective group sessions in media education:

Group Dynamics

- *When possible, arrange seating so that all group members can make eye contact easily.* Chairs can be in a circle or oval. Ask all group members to sit in chairs of the same height — or on the floor. This facilitates group dialogue and strengthens the likelihood of co-learning. Also, don't forget to check things like the size of the room, lighting, and ease of rearrangement (when you will be splitting into smaller groups).

- *Ask questions that begin with "What," "How," "Why," "Which," "When," or "Where."* Don't ask questions that can be answered "Yes," "No" or by a number, like "19."

- *Corollary: Don't fish for what you've determined is the "right" answer.* You'll find your group becoming tentative. If you want the group to know something, just tell them.

- *When asking questions, count to 30 before prodding the group or (even) answering the question yourself.* Many group leaders seem afraid to wait more than a few seconds for the group to respond. If the question is a good one, participants will almost always answer. Give time to ponder.

- *Model answers.* When asking "short response" questions, particularly those for which each participant is expected to give an answer, it's a good idea to answer the question yourself first. This gives participants a moment to think, and gets them on track.

- *Encourage inclusion of all.* Watch to be sure that less talkative group members are included. Perhaps ask, "Jenny, would you like to comment on this?" However, don't pressure or force participants to talk or volunteer. One benefit of breaking up into smaller groups is that participants who seldom speak among larger groups will often talk more openly.

- *Include yourself.* Say "Let's try this activity," not "Why don't *you* try this..." In teaching about media, often the leader knows less about the subject than other participants! Similarly, when divided into smaller groups it's a good idea to visit and participate with several groups during the course of the session (but warn them you'll be doing this!).

- *When listing participants' ideas on newsprint board, etc., list exact phrases in participants' own words.* Don't summarize to make them easier to write down. Participants will feel their ideas are being taken seriously when you list their phrases. Also, avoid numbering participants' ideas, as this gives the inadvertent impression of prioritizing. Use a dash or dot.

- *When listing, refrain from commenting upon each idea as it is recorded.* Premature discussion stifles and limits creative flow of ideas. Record!

- *Rules for Brainstorming:* 1) Anything goes. Any idea will be recorded. 2) No discussion allowed. Discussion will take place afterwards. 3) No making fun of others' ideas.

When it comes to values in the media, the important thing is not to know all the answers but to raise the right questions.

- *Keep groups apprised of where they are in the schedule.* Particularly in small group exercises, tell participants how long the activity will take, then warn them when half of their time is gone (for example, "We should be about half-way finished"), and when a minute or two is left. When time is up, call groups back together. It's okay to "not quite finish."

- *Always evaluate.* You may learn about personal hindrances to learning caused by your leadership or by your group. A sample evaluation form is enclosed, or try something more creative (see the enclosed handout "Creative Evaluation Ideas"). But do it. Let us know of both positive and negative comments (return a summary copy of the enclosed evaluation form to: Workshop Coordinator, Center for Media and Values, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034).

- Relax and learn along with the group.

Using VCR's (and Other Electronic Equipment)

- *Test all audio-visual and electronic equipment before use.* Know how to use it or have a knowledgeable person who is responsible. Check the volume, check the picture, have it set to the correct place (or know how to use the counter if you're using two clips from the same tape). It's distracting to wait while someone tries to figure out why the VCR or stereo isn't working. Also, be sure the monitor is big enough for all group members to see easily, or that you have enough monitors for comfortable viewing. Consider having one monitor for each 25-30 participants.

- *Always preview material.* Choose material appropriate for your group — even if you have to modify the workshop process.

- *Design activities to take place during viewing.* For example, say "let's note examples of politically-charged language," or "let's look for brand name logos that reveal who paid for the film."

- *View short segments, no more than about 5 minutes — and keep the lights on if possible.* Keep participants from being lulled into couch potatodom.

- *Remove snow on VCR's.* Set the on-line button (also called "liner/tuner") on the VCR to "line." When you turn off the tape, you won't be bombarded by "white noise." If your VCR doesn't have an on-line button, buy two audio-video output jacks and put one in "Audio In" and the other in "Video In" in the back of the VCR. This fools the VCR and has the same effect.

Recommended Reading

Teaching the Media, by Len Masterman. Simply the best book on media education for teachers. (1985) Routledge, 29 W. 35th St., New York, 10001-2291; 212-244-6412. Canadian toll free: 800-634-7064. u.s.$15.95.

Questioning the Media, edited by Downing, Mohammadi, Sreberny-Mohammadi. Outstanding compilation of essays providing a framework for analyzing all forms of mass media. (1990) SAGE, 2455 Teller Rd., Newbury Park, CA 91320. 805-499-0721. u.s.$24.

A Note About Videotape Copyright Restrictions

Since we often recommend that groups view commercially available video tapes, a few notes about U.S. copyright restrictions are appropriate. The following is not legal advice — it is your responsibility to assure that resources you use are shown honestly and legally. For more information, contact Dr. Jerome Miller of Copyright Information Services, (206) 378-5128.

1. According to "fair use" practice in U.S. copyright law, schools may show portions of videotapes and television shows for educational purposes in regularly scheduled classes. Videotapes may not be shown in the classroom for entertainment or recreation. Off-air recordings must be used within 10 "teaching days," but may be retained for 45 days for evaluative purposes. Video segments should come from a legal copy (one that is rented or purchased).

2. With respect to religious organizations, there is an unfortunate lack of clarity about just what is allowable under U.S. "fair use" provisions. Use discretion and be sure to adhere to the rules outlined in the preceding paragraph. For more information, write the National Council of Churches Communications Office, Room 860, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115-0050. Ask for the free pamphlet: "Video Copyright Guidelines for Pastors and Church Workers."

3. Canadian copyright laws differ from U.S. laws. Contact your organizational/institutional office for advice or write the Association for Media Literacy, 40 McArthur St., Weston, Ontario, M9P 3M7.

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CENTER FOR
MEDIA LITERACY

Elizabeth Thoman
Executive Director

Austin Basford
Membership Services

Beth White
Promotions and Public Relations

Jill Larson
Administrative/ Financial Manger

Editorial Offices:
1962 S. Shenandoah St.
Los Angeles, CA 90034
310-559-2944
FAX: 310-559-9396

Orders:
800-226-9494

Canadian Order Desk:
85 St. Clair Ave., E, Room 500
Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8

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Center for Media Literacy

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About the Center for Media Literacy

The Center for Media Literacy (formerly Center for Media and Values) is a not-for-profit educational membership organization dedicated to the vision of an informed citizenry that can *understand, interpret, analyze* and *evaluate* the powerful images, words and sounds that make up our contemporary mass media culture.

We believe that the mass media and popular culture are among the most powerful influences in our lives and in our communities today.

Our mission is to help children and adults prepare for living and learning in a global media culture by translating media literacy research and theory into practical information, training and educational tools for teachers and youth leaders, parents and caregivers of chlidren.

Membership

Now is the time media literacy! Membership in the Center for Media Literacy keeps you abreast of the issues, developments and best resources for media awareness education.

General Membership is best for individual teachers, leaders, parents and concerned media users, as well as local churches/synagogues, schools, community centers, parenting programs or study circles.

Annual General Membership $35 / $50 / $100 / $250

Benefits include:

- a year's subscription to the Center's quarterly publication;
- 10% discount on all Center resources including Media Literacy Workshop Kits™ and back issues of *Media&Values* magazine. Discount also applies to videos, books and additional publications;
- reproducible one-page *Media Literacy Basics* to help you teach and learn about media;
- opportunity to network and connect with other individuals concerned about the influence and impact of media in our lives and help build the critical mass needed for effective change.

Institutional Membership is best for regional/state agencies, national orgainzations, religious communities, dioceses/synods, school systems, large churches/synagogues, resource centers or other entities that wish to have a stake in the future of the Center for Media Literacy by providing annual sustaining financial support. They also receive additional benefits.

Annual Institutional Membership $200 / $500 / $1000-$2000

Benefits include:

- multiple copies of Center publications;
- "VIP" mailings to keep you informed of media literacy developments as influential leaders nationally or regionally;
- 20% discount on purchase of media literacy resources and videos from the Center's catalog;
- Reprint permission to use Center articles, action items in your own publications;
- opportunity to order additional subscriptions at substantial savings.

CENTER FOR MEDIA LITERACY

Key Concepts about

Parenting in a TV Age

A Parent Education Program
about Children and Television

• ***Parenting in a TV Age*** is a tool to assist parents in learning how to manage the onslaught of media in the lives of their children.

• It's an ideal resource for parenting groups, PTA programs, adult education classes or other venues where parents gather for support and assistance in the challenging task of raising children in the 1990s.

• The key concept is that mass media can no longer be ignored as "mindless entertainment." The influence of television and media must be managed by all adults who care for children — just as they manage other aspects of children's lives: nutrition, exercise, opportunities for social, spiritual and intellectual development.

• But because many parents themselves have never had the opportunity to learn skills of media literacy and media management, they don't know how to organize it for their children. ***Parenting in a TV Age*** helps them develop, step by step, the knowledge and skills to "take control" of TV and media in their home.

• It starts with time management and moves through issues such as coping with commercials and setting standards for the watching of violence. A final session introduces parents to the Children's Television Act of 1990 and how to work with local broadcast stations to improve television for all children in their community.

• ***Parenting in a TV Age*** consists of group process activities for four 2-hour sessions. This is the ideal. Some sponsoring groups reorganize it into eight or ten 1-hour sessions; others condense it into a one-day or a week-end event.

• Parents may object that they "don't have time" to attend such a program. They often come around when reminded that if their preschool child watches just 3 hours of TV a day, the child will have watched 5000 hours of TV before the child even goes to first grade! Don't parents have eight hours to learn how to help them get the most out of this experience and counter the potential negative effects?

• Another argument: If a stranger came to their door and asked to come in and play with their child for several hours alone and unattended, such a person would surely be questioned thoroughly by any thoughtful adult! Yet, without a pause, we

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regularly turn on the TV, leaving children for hours at a time to try to make sense out of the flickering images, sounds, ideas and stories that come through the set.

• ***Parenting in a TV Age*** is the only parent education program in the U.S. that deals exclusively with television/media. It is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and has broad support from groups like the National PTA, the National Council of Churches, Action for Children's Television, the National Parenting Instructors Association and many others.

• The retail price is $27.95 making it accessible to almost any organization that wants to purchase the kit and sponsor sessions for their members or for the general public. There is a 24-hour toll-free telephone order number: 1- 800-226-9494.

• No special knowledge is required to lead ***Parenting in a TV Age***. Any experienced group leader or teacher can conduct the sessions with a few hours preparation.

• NOTE: ***Parenting in a TV Age*** is not designed as a resource for individuals to purchase and read on their own. It is written as a set of instructions for a group process of 10-40 participants with accompanying reproducible handout masters. We believe that only in peer groups will parents gain the support to implement the behavioral changes needed to "take control" of TV with their children -- and themselves!

• ***Parenting in a TV Age*** is one of a series of learning resources and curriculum programs developed by the **Center for Media Literacy**, a non-profit membership organization with over 2500 individuals, schools, churches and community groups that form a burgeoning media literacy "movement" in the U.S.

• This movement is increasingly able to address many concerns that were formerly thought hopeless: violence in the media, countering tobacco/alcohol advertising, overcoming gender and racial stereotyping, etc. The media literacy movement challenges both producers and consumers to responsibility and accountability for the mass media environment in which our children are growing up.

• Membership in the **Center for Media Literacy** begins at $35. Benefits include 10% discount on all resources (including *Parenting in a TV Age)*, a year's subscription to the Center's publications, access to the Media Literacy HelpLine — plus opportunity to participate in building the media literacy movement in the U.S.

• ***Parenting in a TV Age*** was developed with funding from a wide variety of supporters that care about children, including the ACTA Foundation, the Lawrence Welk Foundation, the William T. Grant Foundation, the Foundation for Child Development, the United Methodist Church and the United Church of Canada.

MAKING THE MEDIA WORK FOR YOU

Action Ideas for Family Awareness

By Rosalind Silver

Ever think about what happens at your house when the phone rings?

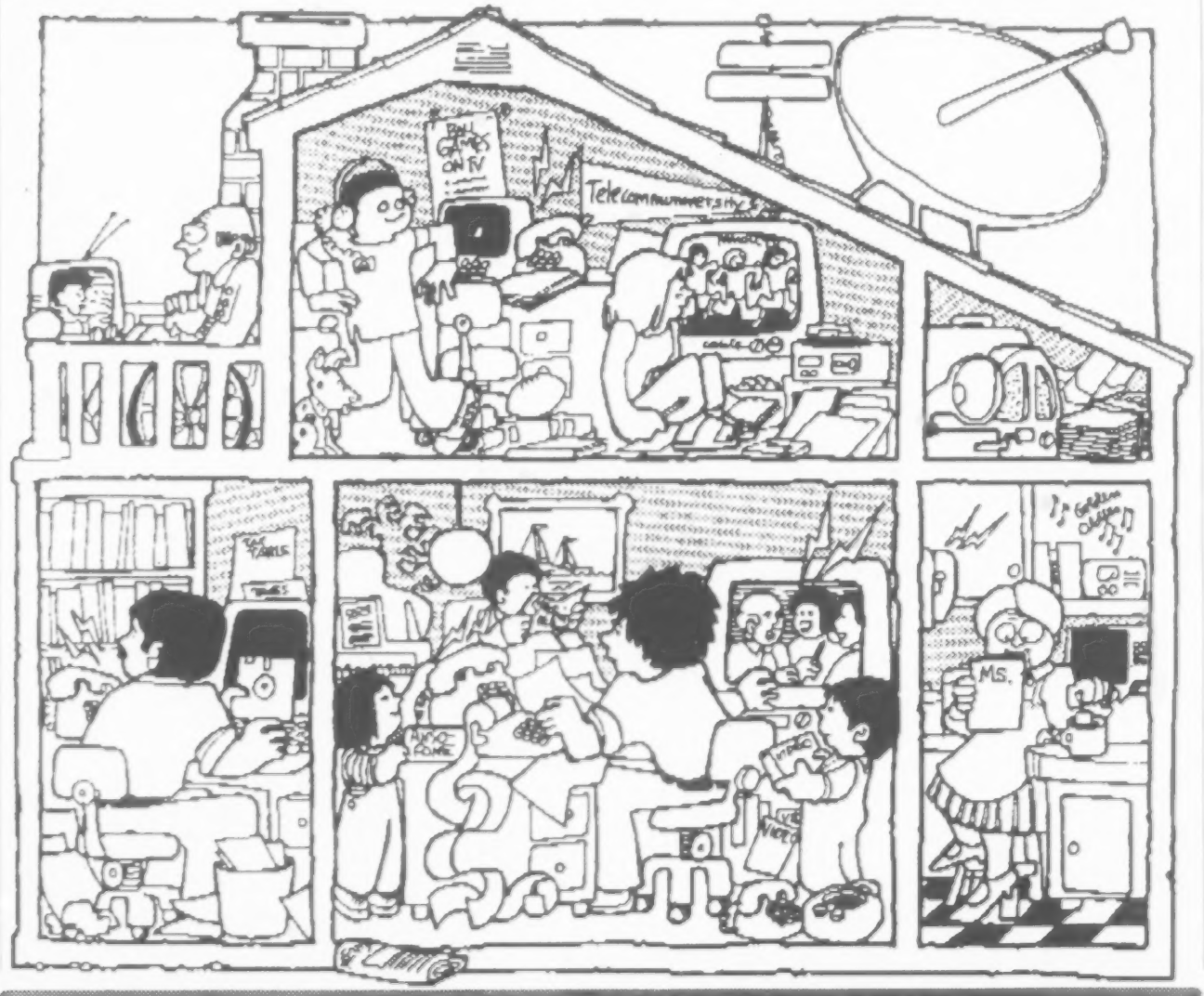
You put down the bank statements and the automatic calculator while you grope wildly for the remote control that will turn down the sound on the video movie you're watching. Of course, it's hidden along with the VCR control under the pile of magazines you were catching up on earlier during breaks in the action.

In the meantime, your husband hesitates as he listens to see if someone is going to get there first. He really doesn't want to take the time to ask the computer to save the tax records he's working with.

The 12-year-old didn't hear the phone. He's got his cassette player earphones on and is dancing madly to a beat that only he can hear.

The 16-year-old hasn't answered an ordinary phone in months. The distinctive ring on her phone store original in the shape of a rock star is the only sound that has meaning. Besides, she's absorbed in the latest MTV offerings being displayed on the upstairs cable hookup.

The eight-year-old isn't too eager to spring for it, either. She's concentrating on the multi-image video game she got for her birthday.



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"Oh well, the answering machine will get it," you say as you relax amid the lapful of remote control devices and piles of papers. But you didn't reckon on the enthusiasm of the three-year-old. He's been able to turn the television on and off and insert a video cassette in the VCR for almost a year, but the telphone is still a challenge. Of course his piping, immature voice may be a little soft for the caller to hear. But he knows how to say, "Mommy, it's for you."

As the foregoing fictional example illustrates, it's not easy to keep tabs on media usage in a modern household. Except for the telephone, TV and radio, most of the communication devices mentioned were not in commmon use even ten years ago. These days they're so widespread that a media survey could almost be taken in your living room. And a media critic who wants to know what program the children are watching could be justly answered: "Which child?"

From MTV to talk-radio, video cassettes to health magazines, media are in the business of making money.

One thing hasn't changed, however. From MTV to talk-radio, video cassettes to health magazines, media are in the business of making money. And the way they do it is by selling you — your family's needs, desires and consumption habits are directly and indirectly of great value to the companies and services marketing everything from soap and groceries to Ninja Turtles and off-road vehicles. And from six to 60, it's all too easy to fall into the trap of changing your values and lifestyle and those of your family members to match what you see and hear on television/radio/MTV/cable.

If you have thought about this situation before, you've taken the first step towards taking control of your media life. Experts say this can have a powerful effect. Although the content of modern media could certainly be improved, few critics deny its positive potential. But eliciting this potential requires an active rather than a passive approach to media usage.

Of course, that was always true of television, too. But with a plethora of media choices to make daily, individual family selections are more and more difficult to monitor.

Media consumers of all ages need to learn to balance their media in the same way that they need to learn about a well-balanced diet.

The following sections provide introductory discussion ideas and projects to help not only families and children but all of us became more aware of the impact of media in our lives. Use the questions with groups of all ages. Encourage families to have their own conversations and engage in some of the projects. Schedule a "media awareness month" in your church/synagogue or school and organize a variety of activities, including sermons, youth programs or guest speakers.

One important point: the key to intelligent media consumption is a critical stance as opposed to unthinking absorption. Encourage the ability to step back and take a keen look at the techniques used to make media appealing. Remember, since almost everyone, after years of viewing and listening, is a media expert, everyone also has the potential to become an aware media critic.

Advertising

The word begins with "A," but it's also a good place to start because of advertising's key role in determing the content of a variety of media.

Ads and commercials are very carefully planned to appeal to the target audience of a particular radio or television program. Ads in magazines and newspapers are also strategically placed — the better to entice you to stop and read.

Ideas to Talk About:

- Have you ever seen/heard a commercial like this before?
- Whom do you think it's designed to appeal to? Why?
- How is the same product advertised on television? radio? in magazines? billboards?
- Would you have wanted this product if you had not seen or heard an advertisement? If not, why do you want it now?

For kids:

- Does the toy or product really look like that in real life?
- Is the toy or product intended for boys or girls? Why or why not?
- Do you see any extra props that you wouldn't expect to get if you bought it? If so, do you still want it?
- Is buying the toy or device only the first stage? What other things will you want to buy later? Will they be worthwhile?

Projects:

- Keep track of the products your family buys for a week. How many are items or brands you found out about through commercials?
- Write and act out a commercial for a product you haven't seen advertised. What decisions do you have to make?

Computers

Experts are still quarreling about whether computer literacy means learning about a computer (how it works, and how to program it) or only about how to use the specific programs that fit your needs.

In the meantime, most families purchasing a computer face some major decisions about their joint and individual computer goals and how to satisfy them.

Ideas to Talk About:

- If you have a computer, does everyone in the family know how to use it and how it works (at least the basics of hardware/software, on/off binary principles?)
- Is scheduling of computer time a problem? Who else could be using it and for what? Does it really save time and energy or comsume time/attention that should be givn to other activities?

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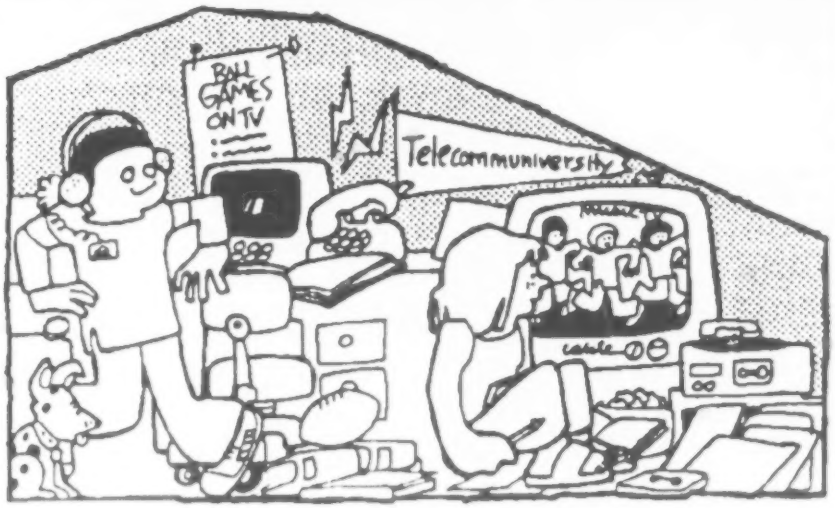

- Is anyone "addicted" to the computer? Is anyone left out?

For Kids:

- Do the boys and girls you know use computers equally? If not, why do you think this is?
- How do you think you'll be using a computer when you get older?

Projects:

- Visit a computer store with the whole family. Does everyone understand what's going on?
- Count and describe the "smart appliances" you have in your life (e.g., microwave ovens or car ignition systems).

Tape Cassette Records

Most of us think of tapes as merely a kind of portable recording, but actually their influence has been profound. Whether played on large but lightweight stereos or a pocket size set with earphones, the words and music of your choice can follow you anywhere — to work or school, exercising, shopping, or walking the dog.

Ideas to Talk About:

- Who decides what tapes to buy? Does everyone get to share them?
- In addition to music, are there other experiences you can have through tapes (poetry, talking books, learning languages)?
- When your family travels together in the car, how do you decide what tapes to listen to? Are there better ways to decide?

Projects:

- Visit a large local bookstore or the public library to look for non-music tapes. Select a tape on some previously unexplored area for every member of the family.

Radio

If your family is like most, the radio is on whenever the television is not. And very likely, someone has it on almost all the time. But not everyone listens to the same station. And with good reason. Programming is very carefully planned to appeal to listeners for specific ages and income levels. Even the sex of the typical listener is a factor.

Ideas to Talk About:

- How many radios do you or your family own? Who uses them most of the time, and where?
- Is your car radio on preset buttons or do you select stations randomly? What influences your choice of favorite stations? Do you ever drive without listening to the radio?

For Kids:

- Would you listen to the radio if nobody else you knew did? How often do you talk about songs or news items with friends or schoolmates?
- How many hours a day do you spend with the radio on?
- What are your favorite songs? Are they big hits? Do you like the same kinds of songs you did a year ago? Two years ago? What's the difference?

Projects

- Make a list of every family member's favorite radio station. Compare lists. Do they make sense in terms of the stations' intended audiences? Any surprises?
- Don't play the radio for three or four days. Did you miss it? Why?

Television

Media theorist Marshall McLuhan called television "chewing gum for the eyes." But few would disagree that some of the most memorabe moments of the last 35 years have been spent in its company.

Today's shows are as maligned as ever — but more than a few golden moments from these first decades are being plumbed for inner meaning and savored as art — developments that might have surprised some of their creators.

Ideas to Talk About?

- How many TV sets do you own and who watches them? Are there any shows you watch as a family?
- How many hours a day are your set(s) on? Does a set ever "run on empty" (with no one watching)? If so, why?
- Are there any times when television is not allowed (dinner hours, study time, family conferences)? Would you like to create more?

Programming is very carefully planned to appeal to listeners for specific ages and income levels.

For Kids:

- Do you like to watch the same shows as your parents? If not, what are some of the differences? Do family members ever fight over what shows to watch? Who decides?
- Would you like to see more shows "just for kids?"
- Do you enjoy shows with lots of action? Or are some of them just too much? Do you think most shows portray life the way it really is?
- Do you ever watch TV when you should be doing something else (studying, chores, playing outside)? How come?

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Projects:

- Over a period of a week or two watch everyone's "most favorite" and "least favorite" shows and discuss them.
- Put the whole family on a video diet for a week. Decide in advance what you're going to watch and when.
- Attend a live event (a play, a concert, a sports activity) that's similar to something you could see on television. How would television have made it different?

Print

Will print disappear with the advent of new media? Its demise is often predicted. At the same time, other commentators point out that proper use of computers and other technology requires literacy and the skills that go with it.

What does seem clear is the changing nature of printed material. Magazines and newspapers designed to respond to a mass market are under increasing pressure, while specialized publications on everything from gourmet dieting to hangliding proliferate. Even the newsletter industry is booming.

Some publications (*Family Computing, Home Video*) are designed to ease users into the Media Age while alternative news publications expand the range of available viewpoints beyond the horizons of local papers and consumer magazines.

Ideas to talk About:

- List the magazines, newsletters and newspapers that come into your home. Do they represent your current interest and needs? Should you discontinue some of them? Add new ones?
- Does your family make good use of your local public library? How could you use it better?

For kids:

- Do you ever read books and newspapers intended for adults? Are they hard to understand? What do you like about them?
- Do you listen to the radio or watch TV while you read? Does one media interfere with the other? Why or why not?

Projects:

- Take time to browse at a local newsstand. Are there titles you have not seen before? Purchase one new publication that interests you.
- Visit your library and make sure every family member old enough has a library card. Ask the librarian for a library tour including the record, tape, video and periodical collections.
- Compare two or three editions of magazines with varying political opinions (e.g. *New Republic, National Review, Washington Monthly, Mother Jones*). Can you spot differences in the way they treat various issues?

Videocassettes

Videocassettes became the surprise media hit of the 1980s. Although the number of independent video creations is growing, use of "old media" still predominates. Viewers particulary value the ability to "timeshift," to watch their favorite television shows and movies when they want to instead of when stations air them.

With this freedom comes a growing sense of frustration that it isn't possible to record more than one program at a time. Some consumers solve this problem by buying multiples VCRs to use with the household's second and third television sets. (In some ways, this parallels the previous individualization of radios, cars and televisions.)

Ideas to Talk About:

- What are you most apt to record and why? Do you have time to watch the programs you record?
- How does viewing a movie on video differ from viewing it in the theatre? Are there movies you would rather see in a theatre setting?

For Kids:

- Can you rent videos without your parents' approval?
- Do you try to rent programs that you think they might not approve of?
- Do you watch rental movies alone or with friends and dates? Which do you enjoy more?
- What kinds of non-movie, non-music videos do you like or use?

Projects:

- Visit the video store or public library together and pick out one movie to view together. How did you come to an agreement?
- Make a list of the subjects you would like in your home video library.

Rosalind Silver is associate editor of Media&Values. *Intern Jeffrey Killingsworth also contributed to the research and writing of this article.*

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